

Political Islam and the Limits of the Indonesian Model

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Abstract

This essay argues that the roots of successful Islamist political mobilization in new democracies lie in the developmental trajectories of the authoritarian regimes that preceded them. Tunisia under Ben Ali and Egypt under Mubarak, where Islamists flourished in opposition, are examples of corrupted development, in which the failure of a secular regime to provide widely shared increases in material prosperity facilitated mass opposition to authoritarian rule under various forms of Islamism. Indonesia under Suharto represents corrupt development, in which sustained improvements in material welfare hamstrung the ability of a nascent Islamist opposition to develop a broad movement base. These differences in the breadth of opposition to incumbent authoritarian regimes, in turn, explain the failure of Islamism as an electoral force in Indonesia, and its success in Tunisia and Egypt.

Keywords: Islam, Arab Spring, democratization, economic development, Indonesia, Tunisia, Egypt.

As popular mobilizations swept away the dictatorships of Tunisia and Egypt in early 2011, analysts and observers looked to other turbulent transitions in Muslim majority countries to help them make sense of the likely course of political change. More than any other country, Indonesia seemed to fit the bill.¹ Like the regimes of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak in 2011, Suharto's New Order regime was pushed from power in 1998 by a popular uprising that remained largely peaceful. In Indonesia, analysts of the Arab Spring revolutions have found another middle-income Muslim-majority

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¹ See, for example, John Sidel, "Separated at Birth," *Foreign Policy* (February 15, 2012), http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/15/separated_at_birth (accessed June 9, 2014), and Thomas Carothers, "Egypt and Indonesia," *New Republic* (February 2, 2011), <http://www.npr.com/article/world/82650/egypt-and-indonesia> (accessed June 9, 2014).

country that underwent a contentious transition to democracy. Like Tunisia and Egypt, moreover, Indonesia had been ruled for decades by a brutal and corrupt dictator who rejected Islamism, relied heavily on the military to maintain order, and always maintained the façade of democracy through rigged elections. Beyond academic and policy analysis, the notion of the Indonesian model for Tunisia and Egypt has influenced practitioners as well. American officials studied Indonesia's transition for clues on Egypt's future,² and activists and politicians participated in a series of meetings and workshops that culminated in an "Egypt-Indonesia-Tunisia Dialogue on Democratic Transition" in Jakarta in April 2012.

Given Egypt's recent backslide into authoritarian rule, it is self-evident that Indonesia's successful transition does not hold the key for understanding Egypt's transition path. Indeed, at the same time that some looked to Indonesia as a guide for the Arab Spring transitions, critical academic perspectives cautioned that Indonesia was not the template or model that a casual analysis might suggest.³ Yet, just as striking is the difference in the role of political Islam in Tunisia and Egypt versus in Indonesia. In fact, among the most notable developments in the Middle East is the electoral success of Islamists. In Tunisia and Egypt, Islam has offered a political vision and ideology that is attractive to many voters, and Islamists of various types—from moderates to Salafists—have employed this vision as a tool of mobilization to their electoral advantage. Given the opportunity to vote for Islamists in free and fair elections, large portions of the electorate in Tunisia and Egypt were quite willing to do so. In Tunisia's October 2011 parliamentary election, 41 percent of the seats went to Ennahda, an Islamist party which had long been banned under Ben Ali's regime.⁴ In Egypt, voters produced resounding victories for the Muslim Brotherhood-linked Freedom and Justice Party and the Salafist Al-Nour in the 2011-2012 parliamentary elections, and the election of Muhammad Morsi as president in June 2012. In fact, it was the resounding electoral success of Egypt's Islamists that engendered the backlash that brought down the Muslim Brotherhood-led government of Mohamed Morsi and returned the military to power in the summer of 2013.

² Jay Solomon, "In Indonesia, a Model for Egypt's Transition," *Wall Street Journal* (February 12, 2011), <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704329104576138490822239336.html> (accessed June 9, 2014).

³ Recent critical overviews of Indonesian and other Muslim transition models include Mirjam Künkler, "Religion-State Relations and Democracy in Egypt and Tunisia: Models from the Democratizing Muslim World—and Their Limits," *Swiss Political Science Review* 18, no. 1 (2012): 114-119, and Marcus Mietzner, "Indonesia's Democratic Stagnation: Anti-reformist Elites and Resilient Civil Society," *Democratization* 19, no. 2 (2011): 209-229.

⁴ Alfred Stepan, "Tunisia's Transition and the Twin Tolerations," *Journal of Democracy* 23, no. 2 (2012): 89-103.

The electoral success of Islamists in Tunisia and Egypt stands in sharp contrast with the failure of Islamists in Indonesia. Indonesia's 1999 democratic elections, the first since the collapse of the authoritarian New Order during the Asian Financial Crisis, witnessed vigorous competition by various Islamist parties.⁵ But the top vote performers were the nationalist Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) with 34 percent of the popular vote, followed by the corporatist, New Order-linked Golkar with 22 percent. Two multireligious parties with roots in Muslim social organizations (the National Awakening Party [PKB] and the National Mandate Party [PAN]) together added about 20 percent more. Islamists won only 13 percent of the popular vote—with most going to the Development Unity Party (PPP), a relatively moderate holdover from the New Order regime's strategy of merging all Muslim political forces into a tolerable Muslim opposition party.

Motivated by widespread commentary about the similarities among Tunisia, Egypt, and Indonesia, at their moments of transition, this essay investigates why Islamist parties have fared so well in North Africa when they fared so poorly in Indonesia. Possible explanations for these differing trajectories abound. Perhaps Indonesian Muslims are less likely to associate Islam with political activism than Muslims in the Middle East. Or perhaps Ennahda and the Muslim Brotherhood are just older and more established—and therefore more credible to voters—than various Islamist groups in Indonesia.

This essay argues that, although these observations may hold some clues, they also raise difficult analytical questions. Indonesia, too, has a long history of organized Muslim political activism dating back to the early twentieth century, and Islamist parties such as Masjumi performed well in the 1955 elections, the last before Indonesia's subsequent authoritarian turn.⁶ Additionally, the observation that Indonesian Muslims are less likely to associate religion with political activism simply restates the problem: so why did Tunisians and Egyptians turn to the Islamists when Indonesians did not?

I argue in this essay that the answer to this question lies in a comparative historical approach to Islam as a social, economic, and political force in Tunisia, Egypt, and Indonesia. This approach begins with a closer focus on the record of economic development under authoritarianism during the decades that preceded the democratizing moments in the three countries. What sets Suharto's Indonesia apart from Ben Ali's and Mubarak's regimes is the New Order's long record of sustained economic development. This contrasts with the relative stagnation—and, ultimately, the exhaustion—of the secular political-economic models followed by the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt. Even though none of these regimes was sympathetic to Islam as a political

⁵ R. William Liddle, "Indonesia in 1999: Democracy Restored," *Asian Survey* 40, no. 1 (2000): 32-42.

⁶ See Justus M. van der Kroef, "Indonesia's First National Election: A Sociological Analysis," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 16, no. 3 (1957): 237-249.

voice, and even though the regimes all married military, party, and state power to create political regimes that seemed impervious to reform and each used developmentalist language to justify its continued rule, only Indonesia's New Order actually delivered sustained development to its subjects.

As Philip Khoury first argued three decades ago, Islamism emerged as an alternative to the Arab world's secular regimes as a response to long-term processes of social and economic decay and the failure of secular models of national development.⁷ Democratic elections in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011-2012 simply empowered Islamists in these countries to organize and campaign freely. Indonesia's New Order, however, never experienced the long-term decay seen in Tunisia and Egypt: authoritarianism collapsed only after decades of economic growth were punctuated by an abrupt economic crisis. Islam had become more visible and prominent in Indonesia during the early 1990s, but had not coalesced into an alternative political force with deep movement roots across a wide swath of disenfranchised citizens. When democracy arrived, it freed Indonesia's Islamists to compete, but before they had constructed the social coalition needed to prevail in democratic elections. The developmental success of the New Order, in other words, stalled the rise of political Islam in Indonesia, while decades of developmental stagnation in Tunisia and Egypt fostered it.

The varying successes of Islamists in Indonesia versus Tunisia and Egypt reveal the limitations of Indonesia's transition as a model for Tunisia's ongoing democratic transition and the aborted democratic transition in Egypt. In terms of hegemonic party institutions, civil-military relations, mode of transition, and dominant religion, the parallels between Indonesia and its North African counterparts are clear.⁸ But the New Order's enviable developmental record over three decades left post-authoritarian Indonesia with very different socioeconomic fundamentals than can be found in Tunisia and Egypt today. These different social and economic baselines mean that in the short- to medium-term, Islamists have enjoyed far more success in Tunisia and Egypt than they have in democratic Indonesia. They also have heighten the stakes for the critical economic and social reforms that must take place as Tunisia struggles to emerge from authoritarianism and Egypt attempts to do the same, which is of an altogether different sort of struggle than that needed after the fall

⁷ Philip S. Khoury, "Islamic Revivalism and the Crisis of the Secular State in the Arab World," in *Arab Resources: The Transformation of a Society*, ed. Ibrahim Ibrahim (London: Croom Helm, 1983), 213-236.

⁸ The logic of comparison is one of the Most Similar Systems. See Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune, *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1970). Indonesia, Tunisia, and Egypt were similar across many of the factors that could have led to the growth of a powerful Islamist opposition under authoritarian rule that was well-poised for political success immediately after the transition. These similarities help to isolate the key difference among the three: the developmental success of the New Order regime, and the developmental stagnation of the Ben Ali and Mubarak regimes.

of Indonesia's New Order.

Beyond explaining the differing trajectories of new Muslim-majority democracies, this essay also has implications for the comparative study of political Islam. Specifically, I reject two essentialisms: (1) the essentialist perspective of Indonesian Islam as a diminished, improper, or foundationally different variant of Arab Islam, and (2) the essentialist perspective that political Islam can be studied separately from the specific social, historical, and economic conditions of the countries in which Muslims live. Scholars of political Islam in the Arab world have long rejected the second essentialism, yet the knee-jerk search for a Muslim counterpart for the Arab Spring transitions has allowed hints of this essentialism to creep back into contemporary discourse. My argument in this essay insists that we must problematize the failure of Islamists as an electoral force in Indonesia, rather than simply assume that this outcome is the natural consequence of a gentle, syncretic, tropical Islam in Southeast Asia⁹ that somehow cannot produce Islamists. My provocative claim can be phrased as a counterfactual: had Indonesia's New Order failed to deliver on its developmentalist promises, it, too, would have faced a powerful Islamist opposition which would have been able to prevail at the ballot box upon democratization.

In the next section, I outline the basic trajectories of economic performance under Ben Ali, Mubarak, and Suharto. The following section links these differences in economic performance to the development of mass-based Islamist political movements in Tunisia and Egypt, and their absence in Indonesia. The final section concludes with a forward-looking evaluation of the challenges facing new democratic governments, and how historical legacies from their authoritarian predecessors shape them.

Corrupt Development versus Corrupted Development

In linking long-term economic trajectories under authoritarianism to Islamists' electoral fortunes in the new Muslim democracies, one commonality across the three countries must be made clear: the authoritarian regimes in Indonesia, Tunisia, and Egypt were all corrupt, and fantastically so. In fact, Suharto may have been the most corrupt political leader in modern world history, if corruption is measured by the amount of money that a politician extracts (or plunders, or simply steals) from his country's coffers. A 2004 report from Transparency International estimated that Suharto had extracted as much as

⁹ Azyumardi Azri has termed this the "myth of *abangan*." See Azyumardi Azra, "Bali and Southeast Asian Islam," in *After Bali: The Threat of Terrorism in Southeast Asia*, ed. Kumar Ramakrishnan and See Seng Tan (Singapore: World Scientific, 2003), 39-57. See also Suzaina Kadir, who cites the late, prominent Indonesianist Daniel Lev as having argued that "Islam in Indonesia is different from anywhere else in the world"; Suzaina Kadir, "The Islamic Factor in Indonesia's Political Transition," *Asian Journal of Political Science* 7, no. 2 (1999): 21-44.

U. S. \$35 billion over three decades.¹⁰ Comparable figures for Ben Ali and Mubarak are unavailable, but most observers agree that both had greatly enriched themselves (and their families, too) during their decades in office. In all three countries, anti-authoritarian movements identified high corruption among political leaders as a central factor motivating their decision to take to the streets to demand political change.

But rampant corruption can coexist with economic development, even without democracy, and sometimes for decades on end. This factor distinguishes the New Order regime from nearly every highly corrupt dictatorship in the post-colonial world. Unlike Ferdinand Marcos, Sani Abacha, or Jean-Claude Duvalier, Suharto enriched himself and those close to him while also presiding over decades of sustained economic development. With economic development came rapid advances in literacy, education, and health. Indonesia in 1965 was one of the world's poorest economies, but by 1997, it had grown into a middle-income country. Suharto accomplished this with an outward-oriented development strategy, implemented through the artful manipulation of Western-trained technocrats, economic nationalists, a small coterie of (primarily ethnic Chinese) cronies and business associates, and various factions in the military and the bureaucracy. New Order development also required the ruthless repression of certain political forces—communists, leftists, Islamists, secessionist groups, and others—that might undermine the New Order's foundation of political stability or question its development model. This was corrupt development, accomplished under a bloody and brutal dictatorship, but it was development nevertheless.¹¹

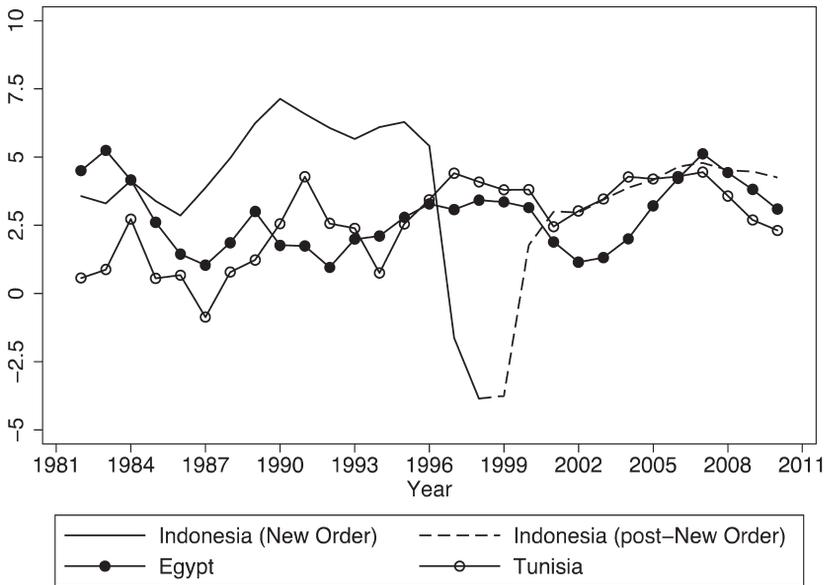
Ben Ali's Tunisia and Mubarak's Egypt never achieved the record of sustained increases in material prosperity that Suharto's Indonesia achieved. In fact, the essentials of development under the three regimes can be summarized in two simple pictures. The first compares economic growth in the three countries (see figure 1). For the past three decades, economic growth in Tunisia and Egypt has been steady but unimpressive, averaging around 3 percent of per capita GDP per year, far below these countries' potential as middle-income countries. Indonesia, by contrast, averaged around 6 percent yearly growth—not only in the decade prior to the collapse of the New Order, which can plausibly be characterized as a bubble economy, but in the two decades preceding that as well. Economic growth during these decades was accompanied by steady

¹⁰ Charlotte Denny, "Suharto, Marcos and Mobutu Head Corruption Table with \$50bn Scams," *Guardian* (March 26, 2004), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/mar/26/indonesia.philippines> (accessed June 9, 2014).

¹¹ See, for example, Michael R. J. Vatikiotis, *Indonesian Politics under Suharto: Order, Development, and Pressure for Change* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Harold Crouch, "Patrimonialism and Military Rule in Indonesia," *World Politics* 31, no. 4 (1979): 571-587; and R. William Liddle, "The Politics of Shared Growth: Some Indonesian Cases," *Comparative Politics* 19, no. 2 (1987): 127-146.

decreases in the rate of population growth, which fell from a yearly rate of over 2.5 percent in 1966 to less than 1.5 percent per year in 1995 on advances in hygiene, infant and maternal care, and family planning. Indonesia's material prosperity, in sum, grew at an astonishing rate under Suharto's New Order. Against this record of strong growth, the tremendous economic contraction of 1997-1998, which forced Suharto from power, stands in sharp relief.

Figure 1. Economic Growth, 1981-2010

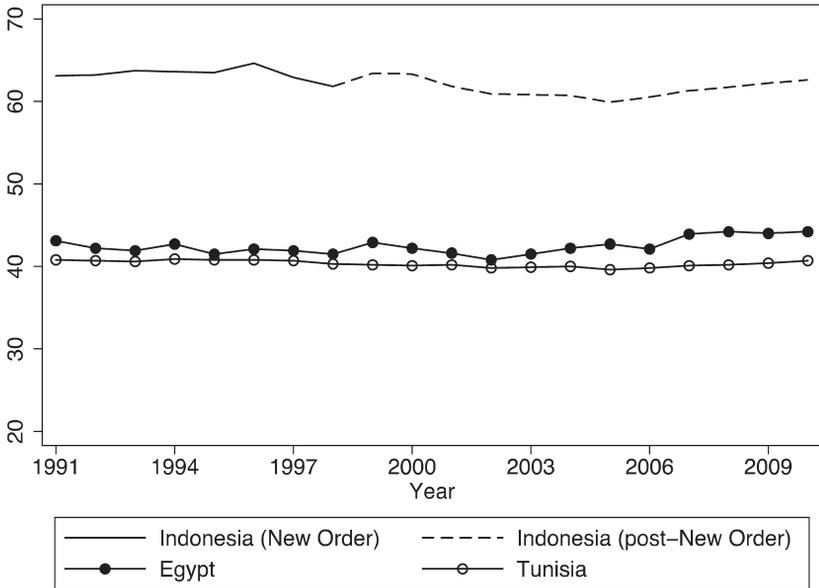


Note: Economic growth is year-on-year percent growth in GDP per capita in constant 2005 international U. S. dollars (presented as three-year rolling averages). The data are calculated from the World Development Indicators online database (see note 17).

The second figure that captures the developmental record across these three Muslim dictatorships is the adult employment rate (see figure 2). Well over 60 percent of Indonesians aged fifteen and older are employed, compared to just over 40 percent in Tunisia and Egypt. Indonesia's enviable employment figures mask nagging problems of *underemployment* for the Indonesian working classes, but underemployment is as much of a problem in Tunisia and Egypt as in Indonesia.¹² Indeed, these figures show that Indonesian employment remained relatively high even during the Asian Financial Crisis, during which

¹² Shafiq Dhanani, "Unemployment and Underemployment in Indonesia, 1976-2000: Paradoxes and Issues," International Labour Office, Geneva (January 2004), <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/ses/download/docs/indonesia.pdf> (accessed June 9, 2014).

Figure 2. Adult Employment, 1991-2010



Note: Adult employment rate is expressed as a percent of the national population aged fifteen and older. The data are from the World Development Indicators online database (see note 17).

rural communities were able to absorb a large portion of the retrenched urban labor force.

The differences between Indonesian employment and Tunisian and Egyptian employment could not be starker. Tunisia and Egypt have been marked by a decades-long crisis of unemployment, particularly among urban dwellers and university graduates. Indeed, contributors to a conference on the crisis of unemployment in the Arab world (held in Cairo in 2008) noted that “the unemployment issue is amongst the pressing social and economic concerns... in the MENA region where its level has been historically high” and that “the long-term development of the Arab world and perhaps its political stability as well, hinges on the region’s ability to generate [a] massive number of jobs on a sustained basis for the next two decades.”¹³ Rural communities in Tunisia

¹³ The first quote is from Syed M. Ahsan and Xing-Fei Liu, “Understanding Unemployment in the Arab Countries: Towards a Policy Framework,” paper presented at the International Conference on the Unemployment Crisis in the Arab Countries, March 17-18, 2008, Cairo, Egypt, 2008. The second quote is from Ibrahim Elbadawi and Norman Loayza, “Informality, Employment and Economic Development in the Arab World,” paper presented at the International Conference on the Unemployment Crisis in the Arab Countries, March 17-18, 2008, Cairo, Egypt, 2008.

and Egypt, moreover, are incapable of absorbing the urban unemployed. And, with underemployment as bad or worse in Tunisia and Egypt as in Indonesia, the employment figures, as dire as they are, still probably underestimate the magnitude of these countries' employment crises. It is for this reason that the image of urban Tunisian and Egyptian youths with few economic prospects formed such a central trope in Western media coverage of the demonstrations in early 2011.¹⁴

Why were Ben Ali and Mubarak unable to promote sustained economic development or encompassing employment like the New Order did? More than perhaps any other country in the Middle East, Tunisia was seen by foreign analysis as receptive to economic reform. Under Ben Ali (and his predecessor Habib Bourguiba), though, a close alliance of organized labor with the state undergirded authoritarian rule and denied Tunisia's informal sector any political voice. Tunisia's political-economic model generated political stability and relatively high wages for part of the labor force, at the cost of widespread informality and unemployment for the rest of Tunisia's population.¹⁵ In the case of Egypt, massive United States aid freed the Mubarak regime from popular accountability for its own performance, and powerful entrenched interests in the state sector resisted many of the basic reforms that would have allowed Egypt to achieve sustained and shared economic development.¹⁶

Beyond growth and employment, other figures are just as emblematic of the differences between the developmentalism of Indonesia's New Order and the developmental stagnation of Tunisia and Egypt.¹⁷ Female literacy in Indonesia had reached 87 percent by 2004—largely on the advances in education made under the New Order—versus just 65 percent in Tunisia and 59 percent in Egypt in 2005. Out-of-pocket health expenditure was consistently lower as a percentage of private health expenses in Indonesia. Public debt prior to the Asian Financial Crisis hovered around 25 percent of GDP in Indonesia, whereas Tunisia's debt averaged closer to 50 percent of GDP from 1990-2010, and the latest figures for Egypt (from 2007) exceeded 85 percent of GDP. The summary picture that emerges from these figures is a pattern of *corrupt development* in Indonesia, in which an iron-fisted dictator established

¹⁴ On stalled development in the Tunisian and Egyptian transitions, see Tarek Masoud, "The Road to (and from) Liberation Square," *Journal of Democracy* 22, no. 3 (2011): 20-34, and Peter J. Schraeder and Hamadi Redissi, "Ben Ali's Fall," *Journal of Democracy* 22, no. 3 (2011): 5-19.

¹⁵ Detailed discussions of capital, labor, and economic transformation in Tunisia can be found in Christopher Alexander, *Tunisia: Stability and Reform in the Modern Maghreb* (London: Routledge, 2010), and Eva R. Bellin, *Stalled Democracy: Capital, Labor, and the Paradox of State-Sponsored Development* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002).

¹⁶ Alan Richards, "The Political Economy of Dilatory Reform: Egypt in the 1980s," *World Development* 19, no. 12 (1991): 1721-1730.

¹⁷ All figures here are taken from the World Bank, "World Development Indicators Online Database" (July 6, 2012), <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators> (accessed June 9, 2014).

a durable edifice of political control without killing his country's ability to produce employment and economic development. This stands in contrast to the *corrupted development* of Tunisia and Egypt, two countries that represent the ultimate victory of the grasping hands of dictators and their allies over their regimes' own developmental ideals.

Party Politics with and without a Base

Economic and social grievances are always a powerful basis for opposition mobilization, and Islamists can capitalize on grievances just like any other political movement can. In all three countries, in fact, Islamists have found that the educated urban middle class—particularly those with grievances against a political-economic order that is incapable of providing employment or hope for a prosperous future to them—comprises one of their central mobilizational bases. The Muslim Brotherhood's mobilizational strategies in Egypt are better documented than are those of Ennahda, but the parallels are likely quite close. The core of the Brothers' mobilizational strategy lies in *da'wa*, or summoning to Islam (sometimes translated as proselytism). But, joining the Brothers' network confers upon individuals both material and ideational resources which, in the words of Carrie Wickham, “built upon—and responded to—the ‘culture of alienation’ that prevailed among educated, lower-middle-class youth” in authoritarian Egypt.¹⁸ The Muslim Brotherhood, like Ennahda, never restricted its appeal to the unemployed or the marginalized, for their platforms of Islamic populism were broad-based and comprehensive rather than particularistic. But, it was precisely those groups marginalized by the political-economic orders of the Mubarak and Ben Ali regimes that proved the most fertile grounds for movement activism and, later, political mobilization.

This movement base never emerged in Indonesia, because Indonesia simply never featured the enduring social and economic stagnation that came to characterize Tunisia and Egypt in the two decades prior to the Arab Spring. The closest Indonesian parallel to the Muslim Brotherhood is the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), which grew out of the *tarbiyah* (Islamic pedagogy or upbringing) movement that emerged in the 1970s. Despite the *tarbiyah* movement's lofty aspirations for transforming Indonesian Islam and Indonesian society along with it, the movement remained largely confined to university campuses as a way to avoid a heavy-handed response by the New Order.¹⁹ Outside of the universities, social and economic conditions in

¹⁸ Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, “Ideas or Interests? Explaining the Success of Islamic Outreach in Egypt,” in *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 231-249. See also Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

¹⁹ Saiful Mujani and R. William Liddle, “Muslim Indonesia's Secular Democracy,” *Asian Survey*

rapidly developing Indonesia were never right for the types of mobilizational strategies so successfully employed by the Muslim Brotherhood, despite the Brothers' inspirational history for *tarbiyah* movement figures. As a result, Indonesia's nascent Islamists never developed the broad constituency or social base enjoyed by their Tunisian and Egyptian counterparts.

Instead, freed from the social and economic malaise that has characterized Tunisia and Egypt for the past three decades, the New Order successfully nurtured a compliant form of Islamic revivalism in the 1990s. It helps that the New Order never banned any of the country's largest Muslim social organizations, and that it preserved an Islamic opposition party (the United Development Party) under authoritarian rule. Following the worldwide trend of Islamic revivalism in the latter half of the twentieth century, Indonesia, too, experienced an Islamic renaissance—of which the *tarbiyah* movement was one early manifestation. Well aware of the ways in which Islamists were challenging the secular regimes in the Middle East, Indonesia's New Order set out to manage this renaissance and the accompanying demands for an expanded role for Islam in Indonesian public life. It co-opted many of the country's religious elites into new, state-sponsored Islamic organizations, such as the All-Indonesia Association of Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI). It carefully crafted a moderate "Islamic" public identity that was, critically, held by the regime to be *entirely compatible* with its nationalist, pan-ethnic, multireligious, and developmentalist foundations. No doubt, many of Indonesia's Muslim elites were dismayed by the New Order's transparently political embrace of Islam—the charismatic religious leader and later president Abdurrahman Wahid famously refused to join ICMI, and hard-line Islamists found little to like about the organization—but there was not much they could do about it while Suharto remained in power.²⁰ Islam under the New Order, insofar as it interfaced with national politics, remained a highly managed and controlled affair, and Islamists never had the opportunity to forge a mobilizational base or a national movement organization that defined itself in opposition to the New Order regime.

The spark for Indonesian democratization was the abrupt failure of the New Order economy in late 1997, and the outrageous corruption that Suharto's efforts to contain the crisis revealed for all to see.²¹ Once popular mobilization against the New Order regime had begun, Islamist groups joined in, but they were just one of many groups advocating for reform alongside Muslim liberals,

49, no. 4 (2009): 575-590, and Yon Machmudi, *Islamising Indonesia: The Rise of Jemaah Tarbiyah and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS)* (Ph.D. dissertation, Australian National University, 2008).

²⁰ R. William Liddle, "The Islamic Turn in Indonesia: A Political Explanation," *Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 3 (1996): 613-634.

²¹ Thomas B. Pepinsky, *Economic Crises and the Breakdown of Authoritarian Regimes: Indonesia and Malaysia in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

leftists, students, and others.²² In this way, the Indonesian *reformasi* movement of spring 1998 actually parallels the Arab Spring mobilizations in Tunisia and Egypt, which Islamists also joined, but neither directed nor controlled. Still, unlike in Indonesia, there was no acute economic shock or critical event that presaged the 2011 revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt; rather, the crises there had been long in the making, the result of the slow and inexorable development debacles, masked by modest growth and outward political stability.

The differences between Islamist political mobilization in Indonesia versus Tunisia and Egypt emerged only after the collapse of the preceding dictatorships. Once these collapses occurred—in May 1998 in Indonesia, and in the early months of 2011 in Tunisia and Egypt—various groups entered the political arena in advance of the first post-authoritarian elections. Indonesia’s Islamists actually had some institutional advantages that Islamists in Tunisia and Egypt did not. They at least had a party (the aforementioned United Development Party, or PPP) which, although tainted by its origins as a creation of the New Order, had the infrastructure necessary to mount a national campaign. In Tunisia and Egypt, formal vehicles for political contestation had to be forged almost from scratch. Party formation piggybacked on the political networks of Islamist politicians who had had some electoral success as individuals, and relied organizationally on the very mass movements—Ennahda and the Muslim Brotherhood—that had been illegal prior to 2011.²³

These organizational disadvantages notwithstanding, both movements were wholly successful in establishing viable political parties in the space of just a few months. Party formation was aided by the broad and deep mobilizational networks that the movements had established during the decades that they had spent as illegal entities. The very existence of these networks depended on the wide popular dissatisfaction with the Ben Ali and Mubarak regimes that had emerged after decades of stagnation and corrupted development. Beyond providing a mobilizational structure, these networks also conferred an additional benefit to both Ennahda and the Freedom and Justice Party: an electoral base. As one observer of the Tunisian elections notes, Ennahda relied on the “passive resistance to the corrupt regime which was organized in the mosques,” alongside the party’s nationwide presence and “quasi-professional” organization.²⁴ The same is true in Egypt, where “the FJP relies on the existing

²² Edward Aspinall, *Opposing Suharto: Compromise, Resistance, and Regime Change in Indonesia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

²³ These networks’ embeddedness in “religious solidarity organizations” further provides them with electoral support. See Tarek Masoud, “Arabs Want Redistribution, So Why Don’t They Vote Left? Theory and Evidence from Egypt,” Faculty Research Working Paper RWP13-007 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Kennedy School, 2013).

²⁴ “Ennahda a pu bénéficier du réseau de résistance passive au régime corrompu qui s’était organisé dans les mosques” [Ennahda may have benefited from passive resistance to the corrupt regime that was organized in the mosques], in Olivier Morin, “Tunisie: Le Vertige Démocratique” [Tunisia: Democratic vertigo], *Études* [Studies] 4, no. 416 (2012): 449-459.

rank and file of the Brotherhood for support in elections.”²⁵ So, when the first post-authoritarian elections arrived in Tunisia and Egypt, their Islamist movements—with extensive mobilizational apparatuses and deep electoral bases—were uniquely placed to perform well in the polls.

Indonesia’s PPP, on the other hand, proved too closely associated with the New Order to welcome most of the previously excluded Islamists. Indonesia’s Islamists seeking office had no choice but to form new parties. One of these was the PKS’s predecessor known as the Justice Party (PK), itself a successor to the *tarbiyah* movement in the newly liberalized political environment. At the same time, though, Indonesia’s newly democratic political space allowed new non-Islamist parties such as PDI-P, PAN, and PKB to flourish as well. These parties, along with Golkar (the New Order’s own hegemonic party), each performed better than PPP, PK, or any other Islamist party in 1999.

PKB and PAN, in fact, occupy an interesting position in this analysis. Both parties were founded in 1998 by members of mass Muslim organizations—Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah—that had remained relatively apolitical under the New Order. Because they were apolitical, they had been tolerated by Suharto. Neither party is “Islamist” in the customary sense of denying the existence of a political sphere of life that is distinct from the religious sphere, yet both are associated with large Muslim organizations. It is no accident that they, rather than the Islamist PK, were the top “Muslim parties” in the 1999 parliamentary elections, even though both PKB and PAN were still outperformed by PDI-P and Golkar. Both NU and Muhammadiyah count tens of millions of Indonesians as members, and as of 1999, each had the organizational structure and support base needed to turn out votes for their parties. In this way, they partially resembled Ennahda and the Muslim Brotherhood in 2011. The critical difference is that NU and Muhammadiyah had both been apolitical for decades, and neither had embraced an Islamist platform to mobilize its support base in the way that Ennahda and the Muslim Brotherhood had.

But why did these two widely influential mass Muslim organizations remain apolitical under the New Order? This question is important because it is the single most compelling alternative explanation for the relative weakness of Islam as an electoral force in post-authoritarian Indonesia. The competing argument would run as follows: had NU and Muhammadiyah chosen to resist the New Order, adopting the oppositional stance of the Muslim Brotherhood and Ennahda, they might have also developed the same deeply rooted political and mobilizational structures that have benefited their North African counterparts. Rather than looking to the developmentalist legacies of authoritarian rule,

²⁵ Sebnem Gumuscu, “Egypt Can’t Replicate the Turkish Model: But It Can Learn From It,” *Sada* (January 12, 2012), <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2012/01/12/egypt-can-t-replicate-turkish-model-but-it-can-learn-from-it/8z6z> (accessed June 9, 2014).

then, the analytical focus should remain on the strategies and tactics adopted by Muslim organizations themselves.

A full explanation of NU and Muhammadiyah's choices is beyond the scope of this essay, but my preferred interpretation conceptualizes NU and Muhammadiyah's choice not to oppose the Suharto regime as itself a product of the New Order's developmentalist success. In this sense, it is probably true that NU and Muhammadiyah could have developed the same mobilizational base and organizational reach that the Muslim Brotherhood and Ennahda developed *had they attempted to do so*. But they did not, precisely because of the constraints that result from confronting such a formidable regime as the New Order. Given the New Order's developmental successes and strong repressive capacity, NU and Muhammadiyah could not draw on a reservoir of popular opposition to corrupted development, and therefore opted not to expose themselves to a regime that maintained the capacity to repress them had they engaged in overt oppositional activity. Doing so allowed NU and Muhammadiyah to survive as "abeyance structures" for a certain stream of Indonesian political Islam,²⁶ but prevented them from quickly establishing a broad electoral base immediately following democratization. As it was, their hastily-constructed electoral vehicles of PAN and PKB did perform well relative to other Islamist parties, and Amien Rais and other politicians associated with the so-called "Central Axis" did play a decisive role in the selection of NU's Abdurrahman Wahid as Indonesia's first democratically elected president.²⁷ But alone, neither Islamists nor the partisan offspring of social organizations were able to flex nearly the electoral muscle that either Ennahda or the Muslim Brotherhood could.

Conclusion: Islam in Office

This essay has argued that the differing fortunes of Islamist parties in post-authoritarian elections in Indonesia, Tunisia, and Egypt can be traced to the developmental trajectories under the prior authoritarian regimes. For analysts and practitioners seeking to understand the course of democratization in Tunisia and Egypt, there are real limits to the Indonesian model that originate in the very different economic fundamentals that characterize different post-authoritarian Muslim societies. These shape how opposition movements mobilized *under* authoritarianism, and how they have performed *after* authoritarianism. This observation does not deny the other ways in which Indonesia's transition might still serve as a template for understanding Tunisia's

²⁶ On abeyance structures, see Verta Taylor, "Social Movement Continuity: The Women's Movement in Abeyance," *American Sociological Review* 54, no. 5 (1989): 761-775.

²⁷ For a contemporaneous discussion, see Jamie Mackie, "Indonesia's New 'National Unity' Cabinet," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 35, no. 3 (1999): 153-158, and Kadir, "The Islamic Factor."

ongoing democratic transition and Egypt's aborted transition. These include, most importantly, military and judicial reform, two key reform areas that were particularly important for Egypt in the crisis surrounding the constitutionality of its 2011-2012 parliamentary elections. But, when it comes to the question of Islamist political mobilization and its electoral consequences, Indonesia's own experiences are unlikely to be representative in post-authoritarian Muslim societies such as Tunisia and Egypt, where authoritarian regimes failed to provide the economic development that the New Order so ably provided.

In general terms, the comparison of Tunisia, Egypt, and Indonesia suggests that successful and broadly shared development is a sufficient condition for the failure of Islamist electoral mobilization in post-authoritarian contexts.²⁸ There may be other causal pathways that can lead Islamists to fail at the ballot box in post-authoritarian contexts, but these three cases demonstrate the particular role that developmentalist trajectories under authoritarian rule can play. There are some additional scope conditions to these claims, however. Tunisia, Egypt, and Indonesia are post-authoritarian contexts where developmentalist dictators ruled over Muslim majority populations with distinctly non-Islamist electoral regimes for long stretches of time. These scope conditions rule out the applicability of the theory to historical examples of democratic transitions in countries such as Bangladesh, Mali, Pakistan, Senegal, or Turkey. They include democratizing moments in countries such as Algeria (1991) and Iraq (2003), which appear to be largely consistent with this argument. These scope conditions also imply that this argument should apply to any prospective democratic transition in Kazakhstan, Malaysia, or Syria, but not to a country such as Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, or any of the Gulf states. The ideal external test of this argument would be another case like Indonesia: a Muslim-majority state—ideally in the Middle East or North Africa—where a developmentalist dictator comparable to Ben Ali or Mubarak had presided over Indonesian-style social and economic development. Such a country does not exist, but if it did, and if Islamists developed deep movement roots and had prevailed in elections after democratization in such a country, that would be evidence against the generality of the claims made here.²⁹

It is also possible that this argument could travel to non-Muslim contexts as well. Although this discussion is necessarily provisional, in the

²⁸ There is no hard and fast rule to distinguish successful development from failed development that can be inferred from these three country cases. Because development is a multidimensional concept, it encompasses a mix of changes to the economic and social conditions, as discussed above in characterizing the divergence of the Indonesian and North African trajectories.

²⁹ Outside of the Middle East, Malaysia may offer the closest parallel of a developmentalist electoral authoritarian regime. Yet, despite the increasing prominence of Islam in Malaysian daily life, Islamism as a political movement has failed to dislodge the Malay-dominated ruling coalition. Indeed, as of early 2014, Islamists in Malaysia were junior partners in an opposition coalition with a social democratic party and a multi-ethnic liberal party.

1970s and 1980s, Catholicism functioned in analogous ways to Islam under authoritarian rule in Latin America and the Philippines. The crucial difference is that antiregime Catholic parties did not form in any of these countries, for reasons that are not clear. Moreover, while it is not possible to conclusively explain why religion, in general, is salient to those who suffer under failed developmentalist dictatorships, Khoury's original argument that religion emerged as a mobilizational force only after the exhaustion of nationalist and socialist ideologies may offer some hints. Comparisons of Islamist mobilization versus Christian and other forms of religious mobilization in non-Muslim countries represent a rich area for future research.

Looking forward, the paths of Tunisia and Egypt have diverged. In Tunisia, the central question is how Ennahda will govern. Its choices will help to determine how Tunisians can address the social, economic, and political challenges that country faces.³⁰ Indonesia offers no template here: Indonesia's Islamist parties have never won national office, and the closest that they have come is the brief presidency of the decidedly non-Islamist Abdurrahman Wahid. Egypt's path is more fraught: the coup of summer 2013 ended Egypt's brief experiment with Islam in office, and the Muslim Brotherhood once again finds itself in opposition and the victim of state repression, justified by appeals to order and security. Once again, Indonesia is no model. But the very fact that Indonesia *is not* representative of all new Muslim democracies suggests two general conclusions about the course of the Tunisian and Egyptian transitions.

First, that Indonesia cannot serve as a model reminds us that Islamists are a heterogeneous group, so understanding how they will govern requires more nuance than the simplifying label of "Islamist" can provide. Islamists differ with respect to the extent of their movement base and electoral constituency, as the Indonesian case reminds us. But even successful Islamist political movements confront very different social structures, economic conditions, and policy challenges in different national contexts. Alfred Stepan recently argued that the Tunisian transition has produced a minimal democracy, highlighting both the broad consensus that democracy is "the only game in town" and the acceptance by most Tunisians (Islamists and others) that the elected government may "govern without having to confront denials of their authority based on religious claims."³¹ Egypt's transition remains incomplete, and Stepan argues that its "political society" remains underdeveloped. Perhaps these differences can themselves be traced to differences in the ways that Ben Ali and Mubarak ruled, but the main implication is that Islamists in Tunisia must rule differently

³⁰ As of September 2013, Ennahda had agreed to step down, which would pave the way for new elections. See "Tunisia Coalition Government Agrees to Resign," *Al Jazeera English* (September 28, 2013), <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/09/tunisia-coalition-government-agrees-resign-2013928134034862218.html> (accessed June 9, 2014).

³¹ Stepan, "Tunisia's Transition."

than Islamists in Egypt for the simple reason that—common Islamist movement bases notwithstanding—these are two countries with very different civil and political societies.

Second, the concrete problems of governance and challenges of reform differ across the three countries. Indonesian democratization allowed grievances about rampant corruption, injustice, and exclusionary national politics to find a public voice, but it also revealed tensions in national versus local and regional identity and secessionist challenges on the country's periphery. Neither Tunisia nor Egypt has the complex ethnic landscape that characterizes Indonesia, nor the challenges of implementing effective multilevel governance that have so consumed Indonesian policymakers in the post-Suharto era. Neither must fight a counterinsurgency war against an ethnically-defined secessionist movement. Even if Indonesians faced the same issues of public sector, military, and judicial reform that loom in the Middle East, the new governments in Tunisia and Egypt also came to power with an entirely different set of policy challenges in front of them: solving their countries' long-term unemployment crises, providing equitable foundations for human development, rationalizing macroeconomic policymaking, and achieving their countries' long-term development potential. For these, Indonesia is a model not of what will happen, but of what is possible.

The analytical implications of this argument can be summarized by returning to the counterfactual claim outlined in the introduction: had Indonesia's New Order failed to deliver on its developmentalist promises, it, too, would have faced a powerful Islamist opposition which would have been able to prevail at the ballot box upon democratization. This implies that, in conceptualizing the politics of political Islam in democratizing countries, the analytical focus should rest not on national forms of religious practice or belief, but on the social and economic conditions that shape the strategies of religious leaders and movement entrepreneurs. Moreover, the extent to which religious calls to political action resonate depends on the extent to which the existing political formation accommodates citizens' material aspirations.