

Francesco Cavatorta: "Divided they stand, divided they fall": Opposition politics in Morocco.

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Introduction

Francesco Cavatorta is Senior Lecturer in International Relations and Middle East Politics at the School of Law and Government at Dublin City University. His research focuses on processes of political change in the Arab world and on the role of Islamist parties and movements (<http://www.dcu.ie/~cavatorf/>)

Outline:

- The theoretical discussion
- Opposition politics in Morocco
- The thesis of Cavatorta – is his argumentation sound?
- The gradual change in Morocco in light of 2011

The Theoretical discussion

- The studies on democratization focus on cross-ideological co-operation between opposition actors.
- The theoretical expectation: An alliance building occur under authoritarian constraints
- This thesis of coalition building seems theoretically valid enough because it constitutes rational behavior for political groups wishing to reform the existing system.

The Theoretical discussion

- Significant amount of empirical evidence to support this claim of coalition-building (Eastern Europe & Latin America)
- → “Given the theoretical assumption and the extent of supportive empirical evidence, we might expect that similar behavior would occur in other authoritarian contexts where a certain degree of liberalization is introduced and where there are a number of active opposition groups” (p.140).

The Theoretical discussion

Cavatorta

- “It is plausible to argue both that other regions’ democratization experiences are applicable to the MENA as well to contend that the region should not be treated as unique when it comes to social fragmentation, civil society and opposition dynamics” (p.140)
- Alliance-building in MENA has not been deep or effective to an extent that has been significant.

The Theoretical discussion

POINT: alliances in MENA are tentative and ad hoc: Short-term nature of their coalition never develops into more wide-ranging programmes of change.

Limited results, absence of sustainability and generally weak.

“Why this lack of formal coalition?” Why does MENA deviate from this expected behavior?

Opposition Politics in Morocco

- The activism of civil society contains of two major opposition groups: the Islamist (Al-ADL – Sheikh Yassine or PJD) and secular/liberal (Nourredine Saoudi).
- The inability and unwillingness to form a coalition has to be explained according to three factors:
 1. The ideological difference
 2. The tactical considerations
 3. The European Union

Opposition Politics in Morocco

The two different ideological poles

Ideological differences between opposition groups, Islamist versus secular ones, is the main variable explaining the absence of coalition-building.

The very controversial issue of the role of religion in the public sphere is decisive in terms of lack of cooperation.

Two different endpoints:

1. A democratic process in which Islam is established in power
2. A secular state where Islam is excluded from public policy-making.

Opposition Politics in Morocco

The tactical considerations

It is well-known that Islamism has the majority of the public support

→ the secular groups does not want to cooperate as they know the outcome of a possible turn of power.

Opposition Politics in Morocco

The democracy promotion by the international community and the European Union:

- Reinforce the divisions between the two sectors
- The negative impact of the EU is most significant on the civil society level:
- “Its policies are based on a perception that Islamism poses a problem rather than an opportunity” (149)
- → EU provides funds to those associations that represents the ideological view which are close to that of the West – this being the secular group

Opposition Politics in Morocco

- EU as an problematic actor rather than a facilitator of democratic change.
- EU ignores the popularity of Islam, and treats political Islam as only a challenge.
- The EU are unable to see that an alternative to liberal democracy might exist.

The thesis of Cavatorta – is his argumentation sound?

- Maâti Monjib, Historian and Political Analyst, august 2011, in Brookings institution:
- “ The ideological cleavage between Islamists and secularists is one of the most important obstacles to democratization in Morocco”
- “The international community and global civil society organizations dedicated to democracy promotion would be more effective if they collaborated with Islamist parties and organizations in the same way that they collaborate with secular organizations”.
 - http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2011/08_morocco_monjib.aspx
 - <http://www.brookings.edu/saban/about.aspx>

Morocco in gradual change, 2011

- New constitution in July → The king will *not* continue to control every aspect of government and gives more power to the parliament and the prime minister and guarantees the independence of the judiciary. BUT: still leaving control in the hands of the king.

Articles on this subject:

- http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/06/21/the_royal_road_to_democracy
- http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/06/30/morocco_s_constitutional_face_lift

Morocco in gradual change, 2011

- http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/07/05/morocco_s_important_constitutional_vote
- http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2011/0628_morocco_hamid_boukhars.aspx
- EU and its position regarding the new constitution:
http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/123381.pdf

EU and Morocco in general:

- http://www.eeas.europa.eu/morocco/index_en.htm
