

Islam and Democracy: A Study on Rachid Ghannouchi's Views

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Abstract

The compatibility between Islam and democracy has become one of the main controversial issues of contemporary Islamic political thought. Rachid Ghannouchi has been recognised for his adherence to the concept of Islamic democracy. The purpose of this article is to examine the views of Rachid Ghannouchi towards Islam and democracy through a range of his writings and statements. As such, the research methodology applied is qualitative with data collection instruments. The article uses textual analysis to study how democracy is understood by Ghannouchi within an Islamic framework, along with his theory on the compatibility of Islam with democracy. The article has shown that he adopts a perspective of harmony between modern political thoughts and the original form of Islam as he proposes principles and characteristics of Islamic democracy. Islamic concepts such as *shūrā*, *ijtihād*, *maṣāliḥ* and

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values such as justice, freedom, and pluralism are discussed. Ghannouchi's line of thought and its highlights are not free from critics from both the Islamic quarters as well as non-Islamists. Criticisms towards Ghannouchi as well as his responses are duly discussed.

Keywords

Islam, Islamic Democracy, Rachid Ghannouchi, *Shūrā*, Islamic Politics, *Al-Dīmuqrāṭiyah fī al-Islām*.

Introduction

The debate over democracy and its relation with Islam is an enormously contentious issue by the diversity of voices within and outside Islamic circles, ranging from those who completely accept the relation and those who deny it. Within current Tunisian political circles, Rachid Ghannouchi¹ is considered as one of the most important references in contemporary Islamic political thought. He has written on the question of human rights and religious liberty. His books about democracy especially *Al-Dīmuqrāṭiyah wa-Huqūq al-Insān fī al-Islām* (Democracy and Human Rights in Islam)² and *Al-Hurriyat al-'Ammah fī al-Dawlah al-Islamiyah* (Public Liberties in the Islamic State)³ have gained considerable interest. In his discourses, Ghannouchi tries to

1. Rachid Ghannouchi is a Tunisian thinker and politician (b. June 22, 1941). He is the co-founder and president of the Ennahda Movement, an Islamist group that is currently Tunisia's largest political party and the dominant participant in a coalition that has governed the country since the 2011 elections. Ghannouchi is known for his militancy in attempting to modernise Tunisia. He has played a major role in helping Tunisia become a democratic country. See: Linda G. Jones, "Portrait of Rachid al-Ghannouchi," *Middle East Report* 153 (July/August 1988): 19–22; Mohd. Manzoor Alam, *The 100 Great Muslim Leaders of the 20th Century* (New Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies, 2006), 97–8, 99.
2. *Al-Dīmuqrāṭiyah wa-Huqūq al-Insān fī al-Islām* (Democracy and Human Rights in Islam) (Doha: AlJazeera Center for Studies, 2012).
3. *Al-Hurriyat al-'Ammah fī al-Dawlah al-Islamiyah* (Public Liberties in the Islamic State) (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wihda al-'Arabiyyah, 1993).

explore the prospect of establishing an Islamic democracy by defining and discussing Islamic political concepts and the features of the modern democracy to provide a foundation for understanding the relationship between Islam and democracy and shape Muslim perceptions of what represents legitimate and authentic democracy in an Islamic framework. In this article, an attempt is made to analyse Islam and democracy in Ghannouchi's discourses which mainly cover his perceptions of several issues of Islamic democracy along with criticisms towards his stand and attitudes.

Ghannouchi's Conception of Democracy

According to Ghannouchi, democracy is neither a philosophy nor an ideology but rather a set of tools and mechanisms for controlling government power.⁴ He adopts Bennabi's conception of democracy which sees Islamic polity as a psycho-sociological approach and an educational step for the whole nation.⁵ Democracy, as Bennabi perceives it is not merely a political process but a sentiment of society towards its collective issues started by generating the democratic spirit in its individual together with collective ethics and psyche before implementing it as a political process. With this, the authority can be transferred to people, and a constitution of a nation becomes sovereign.⁶

Ghannouchi's conception of democracy is close to the model of democracy in the west. As expressed in the American Declaration of Independence,⁷ democracy is very much used

4. Ghannouchi, *Al-Hurriyat al-Ammah*, 88.

5. *Ibid.*, 75–76.

6. Malik Bennabi, *Al-Qadāyā al-Kubrā* (Damascus: Dār Al-Fikr, 1991), 133–46.

7. The declaration was made on 4 July 1776. It proclaimed as follows:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men,

to describe the political system in which citizens participate in the political process equally.⁸ It is also a system that supports the separation of power and political pluralism along with enjoining individual freedom and social betterment as against the despotic and absolutist rule. Thus, the people are the supreme power of the system. According to Macpherson, “Democracy is understood as a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives.”⁹

Compatibility of Islam with Democracy

Ghannouchi strongly believes in reconciliation between Islam and democracy. To him, Islam does not contradict democracy. In fact, it shares the same features and parallel characteristics with democracy.¹⁰ Islamic tradition indeed has certain concepts that are relatively helpful in understanding the Islamic perceptions of democracy such as *shūrā*, *khilāfah*, *ijmāʿ*, *ijtihād* as well as values such as freedom, justice, equality, human rights, public welfare, peace, tolerance, and others.¹¹ Such concepts and values are completely in line with the principles and notions of contemporary democracy. The general idea of reconciliation between democracy and Islamic concepts such as *shūrā* and *ijmāʿ*

deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.—That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their Safety and Happiness. See Thomas Jefferson, *United States Declaration of Independence*, 6:283–284.

8. Caroline Cox and John Marks, *The West, Islam and Islamism: Is Ideological Islam Compatible with Liberal Democracy?* (London: Civitas, 2003), 3.
9. John Keane, *Introduction: Democracy and the Decline of the Left* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1997), ix–x.
10. Ghannouchi, *Al-Hurriyat al-Ammah*, 88.
11. Tauseef Ahmad Parray, “Islamic Democracy or Democracy in Islam: Some Key Operational Democratic Concepts and Notions,” *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization* 2, no. 2 (2012): 67.

were adopted before by many scholars such as Afghānī, Abduh, Kawakibā, Riḍā, and Malik Bennabī.

The use of the term “Islamic democracy” does not mean that the exact word “democracy” is mentioned in the Qurʾān or Sunnah. It only means that the Islamic heritage contains key concepts, features, characteristics, and values that show resemblance to the democratic principles and its perceptions.¹² In this context, Ghannouchi provides a firm foundation for conceptualising a practicable foundation of democracy in Islam by employing certain concepts from the Islamic tradition¹³ as the following:

Mutual Consultation (Shūrā)

Shūrā is generally translated as mutual consultation or consultative decision-making. In Islamic political thought, it refers to collecting and discussing different opinions deliberately on a particular subject to reach a decision. However, according to Ghannouchi, *shūrā* is the mutual power of interpreting text for the entire Ummah, who are the vicegerents of God in implementing the *Sharīʿah*, and not to be monopolised by any person or institution.¹⁴ He ascribes *shūrā* as an essential foundation of an Islamic government system. The main objective of *shūrā* in political practice is to govern relations between political authority and the citizens. For Muslims nowadays, they can find in a democracy appropriate instruments like elections, the parliamentary system, the separation of powers, among others to structure *shūrā* in the society.¹⁵

12. Tauseef Ahmad Parray, “Operational Concepts of Islamic Democracy—*Khilāfah, Shūrā, Ijmaʿ, and Ijtihād*,” *Journal of Humanity & Islam*, 1 (2011): 12.

13. Ghannouchi mentioned this in *Al-Hurriyat al-Ammah*, 88.

14. Rachid Ghannouchi, “Our View of Modernity and Democracy,” Paper presented at the *Symposium of Islam and Democracy in North Africa*, London School of Economics, 29 February 1992.

15. Ghannouchi, *Al-Dīmuqrāṭīyah*, 59.

Ghannouchi suggests that the Ummah implement and exercise *shūrā* in political affairs at two levels:

First, participation in enacting regulations at the legislative level by interpreting and adjusting the broad divine guidelines to be suitable with circumstances in various forms including deputising, electing representatives, guiding policies, and individual *ijtihād* as well as collective *ijtihād* by groups, universities, mosques, the media, and specialised institutions.¹⁶

Second, at the political level,¹⁷ by choosing and commissioning the rulers for implementing the law and administering affairs.

By accommodating these *shūrā* methods along with learning from liberal democracy, contemporary Muslim communities will develop Islamic democratic practice forms of their own.¹⁸

Consensus (Ijmāʿ)

Ijmāʿ in the context of Islamic political theory is “a consensus, expressed or tacit, on a question of law along with the Qurʾān, Hadith, and Sunnah, as a basis which legitimizes law.”¹⁹ It is the third fundamental source of Islamic law applied to a new issue which the Qurʾān and the Sunnah do not specifically mention²⁰. It was held to be synonymous with public opinion. *Ijmāʿ* plays a vital role in the legal interpretation and development of Islamic law. *Shūrā* and *ijmāʿ* are frequently regarded as the basis for Islamic democracy. In the modern political sense, *shūrā* (consultation) and parliamentary systems are exercised in attempts to formulate a consensus (*ijmāʿ*) on emerging issues.

16. Rachid Ghannouchi, “The Basic Principles of an Islamic State,” Paper presented at a *Symposium on Christian Islamic Dialogue, Germany*, June 1994.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., vol.10 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1768), 9–10.

20. John L. Esposito, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 133.

Traditions of Ijtihād

Ijtihād, or literally “effort,” is “the thorough exertion of the jurist’s mental faculty in finding a solution for a case of law.”²¹ *Ijtihād* is applied to issues that are not covered by the Qur’ān and Sunnah by establishing precedence (*taqlīd*) or by direct analogy (*qiyās*).²² It is a major concept related to the relationship between Islam and democracy. Political issues are included in the framework of *ijtihād*, in which problems emerge and no written solution is found in the Qur’ān and Sunnah. As such, Muslims can exercise their *ijtihād* to devise suitable solutions via the application of the constant values of Islam based on public interests and situations. In such a regard, times and places have to be taken into account.²³

Contractual Agreement (Bay‘ah)

Bay‘ah in a broad sense means the act by which “a certain number of persons, acting individually or collectively, recognize the authority of another person.”²⁴ In a political nature, “the *bay‘ah* is as a “contractual agreement” between the will of the electors, expressed in the designation of the candidate, which constitute the “offer” and, on the other hand, the will of the elected person which constitutes the “acceptance.”²⁵ Thus, a modern process of *bay‘ah* is the process of nomination followed by elections and replaced with ballots as pledging allegiance.²⁶

21. John L. Esposito, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 178.

22. Cyril Glassé, *Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* (London: Stacey International, 1989), 69, 84, 182, 325, 331, 336, and 400.

23. Lino Klevesath, *Religious Freedom in Current Political Islam: The Writings of Rachid al Ghannouchi and Abu al-‘Ala Madi* (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2014), 56.

24. Emile Tyan, “Bay‘a,” *Encyclopedia of Islam* 2nd ed., vol. I (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 1113.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Muqtedar Khan, “Islamic Governance and Democracy,” in *Islam and Democratization in Asia*, ed. Shipping Hua (New York: Cambria Press, 2009), 22.

Such a concept generally establishes consent and cooperation for rulers, and affirms the principles of equality and pluralism.

Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil (al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar)

In Islam, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong is an important requirement and considered a positive role in helping others to take the right path and restrain from despicable behaviours.²⁷ It is a duty that the entire Ummah is obliged to fulfil and forms a central part of the Islamic doctrine for all Muslims. Ghannouchi's theory of compatibility between Islam and democracy lies in the assumption that citizens take responsibility to the public, and it is a civilian authority. A government could be opposed and criticised by citizens if they were misguided.²⁸ The idea is derived from the concepts of *al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*. It is to stand up to authorities when they go wrong and strive to correct them. The Ummah is responsible for enjoining good by forming justice and forbidding evil by deterring corruption. For contemporary Muslims, it can be implemented through appropriate instruments such as assembling, the parliamentary system, separation of powers, etc.²⁹

Theory of Maṣāliḥ and the Maqāṣid

As Ghannouchi endeavours to prove the precepts of an Islamic democratic system within the *Shari'ah*, he refers to the theory of *maṣāliḥ*³⁰ (the plural of *maṣlahah*, exigency, requirement or interest) developed by Imām al-Šhātībī (d.1388). The exigencies of the

27. Husein A. Rahim and Ali Mohamedjeffer Sheriff, *Guidance from Qur'an* (Mombasa: Khoja Shia Ithna-asheri Supreme Council, 1993), 102.

28. Ghannouchi, *Al-Hurriyat al-Ammah*, 59-60.

29. Rachid Ghannouchi, "Islam and Freedom Can Be Friends," *The Observer* (London), 19 January 1992, 18; Ghannouchi, *Al-Dīmuqrāṭīyah*, 21-22.

30. Ghannouchi, *Al-Hurriyat al-Ammah*, 43.

Sharī'ah (*maṣāliḥ*) have been classified into three levels: *al-darūriyyāt* (the imperative), a category which serves to protect five elements of *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* (the higher objectives of the *Sharī'ah*): faith, life, mind, progeny, and property; *al-ḥājjiyyāt* (the necessary, the complementary), without which man is able to survive but with difficulty; and finally *al-taḥsīniyyat* (the enhancing), which concerns anything that may bring about an improvement in the quality of life. The three levels cover all that can be considered as the *maṣāliḥ* (common good) of the human being. The *Sharī'ah* seeks to protect and promote values to serve the interests of humans in this life and the Hereafter.³¹

The theory is applicable to various aspects of the *Sharī'ah* in which neither the Qur'ān nor Sunnah provides a specific rule including politics. Ghannouchi takes it as guidelines and regulations to preserve public interests and secure them from transgression. He adds:

These guidelines and regulations together form a framework, which is spacious enough to comprise all known fundamental rights such as the right to life, to freedom of choice, education, owning property, and to participate in public life and the establishment of a just system of government.³²

The actions of the Islamic state should be governed by the guidelines,³³ and it should adopt a course that is considered to be in the best interest of the community.

31. Abū Ishaq Ash-Shātībī, *Al-Muwāfaqāt fi Usūl al-Sharī'ah* (*Analogies in the Foundations of Sharī'ah*) (Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub Al-'Ilmiyah, n.d.), 6–8.

32. Rachid Ghannouchi, "Human Rights in Islam" Paper presented at the *Symposium of the Association of Muslims*. (Birmingham, 1995). Extracted from Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 91.

33. Ghannouchi, *Al-Hurriyat al-Ammah*, 26, 42–43.

Principles and Characteristics of Islamic Democracy

Democracy, or literally “rule by the people,” is based on certain principles and characteristics, among them justice, power-sharing, political pluralism, freedom of speech, press, as well as assembly, freedom to practise religion, free elections, majority rule and minority rights; separation of the legislature, executive, as well as judicial branches; constitutional authority, that is, supremacy of the rule of law; and freedom of action for individuals and groups.”³⁴

The Islamic democratic principles and characteristics according to Ghannouchi are not different from a contemporary model of democracy. The idea that the democratic system represents the people’s sovereignty through many constitutional techniques which may differ from one another but share principles of equality, election, separation of powers, political pluralism, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly, and the right of the majority to rule and of the minority to oppose. On the other hand, the proposal of a democratic system is to protect the dignity of man and provide his rights by participating in the administration of public affairs, control and influence the governors, and assure the absence of repression and despotism.³⁵ The main principles and characteristics of Islamic democracy as Ghannouchi describes at length are as follows:

Justice

In Arabic, “justice” is *‘adālah* which means balance, fairness, and equality. The opposite of *‘adālah* is *ẓulm*. *Ẓulm* is used interchangeably for cruelty or unjust acts of oppression, wrongdoing, and exploitation whether by depriving the rights

34. Sadek J. Sulaiman, “Democracy and *Shūrā*,” in *Liberal Islam: A Source Book*, ed. Charles Kurzman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 97.

35. Ghannouchi, *Al-Hurriyat al-Ammah*, 77.

of others or failure of fulfilling obligations towards them. Islamic politics prohibits all forms of injustice and considers it to be aggression to God³⁶ as stated in the Qur'ānic verse: "Fight in the Cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits, for Allah loves not transgressors."³⁷ Detering injustice and suppression is a crucial responsibility on each member of the Muslim community. Justice brings God's support to communities, as Ibn Taymiyah inferred that Allah may assist a just state rather than an unjust one even if it were non-Muslim.³⁸

Human Rights, Liberties, and Freedom

Ghannouchi holds safeguarding freedom and defence for liberty as religious duties. If necessary, Muslims have to turn to *jihād* and martyrdom to protect them. He refers to Sayyid Qutb's definition of *jihād* as Islam endorses it for combatting tyranny and oppression.³⁹ Ghannouchi views that Islam provides individual rights and public safeguard including freedom of belief, freedom of thought and expression, economic and social rights, and the right to own property individually in accordance with *Shari'ah* methods.⁴⁰ Among the rights are political rights and liberties which,

...in constitutional terminology means that the Ummah is the source of authorities, and is the possessor of supreme sovereignty in matters of governance in that it chooses the government, monitors its performance, calls it to account, power-shares with it, and dismisses it. Political liberties are a set of mandatory rights recognized

36. Fahmi Huwaidi, *Al-Islām wa Dimuqrāṭiyah* (Islam and Democracy) (Cairo: Al-Ahram Translation and Publishing, 1993), 111.

37. *Al-Baqarah* (2): 190.

38. Ghannouchi, "The Basic Principles of an Islamic State."

39. Ghannouchi, *Al-Ḥurriyat al-Ammah*, 42.

40. Ibid, 291.

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by the state as belonging to the citizens.⁴¹ Moreover, Ghannouchi further elaborates that “They are the right to participate in governance by pressuring and influencing the government via direct or indirect elections and the right to information, assembly, political party formation, and trade union organization.”⁴²

With such approaches, Ghannouchi believes that justice and equality will be established in Muslim communities.

Political Pluralism

Political pluralism in a modern political order refers to “the recognition and affirmation of diversity within a political body, which permits the peaceful coexistence of different interests, convictions, and lifestyles.”⁴³ It stands for power structure distribution or decentralisation in society through institutionalisation such as the legislature, executive, judiciary, bureaucracy, and non-institutionalisation such as civil society, social movements structures and influence in determining society’s collective issues.⁴⁴ As a result, it prevents absolutism and monopoly.

Drawing on Islamic prospects, Ghannouchi quoted a Qur’ānic verse to stress pluralism:

O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the noblest of

41. Ibid., 71, quoted from Ali Abdulwahid Wafi, *Huqūq al-Insān fī al-Islam (Human Rights in Islam)* (Cairo: Dar Nahdat Misr, 1967).

42. Ghannouchi, *Al-Hurriyat al-'Ammah*, 71, quoted from Abdelhadi Abu Talib, *al-Marjī' Fi al-Qanun ad-Dustun Waf-Mu'assasat as-Siyasiyah (Reference of Constitutional Law and Political Institutions)* (Casablanca: Dār al-Kitāb, 1980).

43. Eris Schoburgh and Roberta Ryan, *Handbook of Research on Sub-National Governance and Development* (Hershey PA: IGI Global, 2017), 461.

44. Jürgen Habermas, “Three Normative Models of Democracy,” *Constellations* 1, no.1 (1994): 8.

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you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.⁴⁵

Approving Varieties and Differences in Society

For Ghannouchi, pluralism in a modern Islamic political order can be found within different *ijtihād* of parties in political activities which will boost the trust of the Ummah. It is the most suitable structure for empowering citizens to take their public responsibilities. Even though no written form of political pluralism is found in classical Islamic writings, Ghannouchi views that the traditional Islamic society practised many forms of pluralism. He refers to what occurred in the Battle of *Siffin* (657 CE)⁴⁶ that caused the emergence of three political groups: the *Shiites*, the *Kharijites*, and the *Sunnites*. Each group enforces their vision and values by interpreting classical text and history to seek power.⁴⁷

Power-sharing

Ghannouchi views political power-sharing by the distribution of political power through several state institutions. Power is shared among different organs of the government such as the legislature, executive, and judiciary. Power-sharing is also seen in political parties, pressure groups that will exert influence to those in power. In the broad sense, it appears to be as “any set of arrangements that prevent one agent, or organized collective agency, from being the winner who holds all critical power, whether temporarily or permanently.”⁴⁸ Thus, the powers of

45. *Al-Hujurat* (49): 13.

46. A battle between the followers of Sayyidina Ali RA, the fourth Caliph, and the followers of Sayyidina Mu'awiyah RA, the founder of the Umayyad Dynasty.

47. Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi*, 84.

48. Brendan O'Leary and Joanne McEvoy, *Power Sharing in Deeply Divided Places* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 3.

state delegations are limited, due to power control, sufficient only to implement the *Shari'ah*. This may be called the task of law enforcement in modern terms. It is necessary to prevent the monopoly of power and set a balanced power between the ruled and the ruler.⁴⁹ Such principles shape Muslim perceptions of what represent authentic democracy in the Islamic framework.

The Differences Between Democracy Mechanism in Islam and the Modern Political Democracy

As mentioned, Ghannouchi views that the modern concepts, ideas, institutions and values of democracy are generally in line with the Islamic system of government. He claims that the modern democratic values such as equality, freedom, and justice, and some concepts such as *shūrā* (consultation) and *ijmā'* (consensus) are a few of the principles upon which a modern Islamic democracy can be founded. Still, differences between Western democracy and Islamic democracy are evident. In Ghannouchi's view, Islamic democracy is distinguished from other systems by its moral content as derived from the *Shari'ah*, where the secular and nationalistic Western democratic values need to be improved in the liberal democratic system.⁵⁰

Significance of Democracy in the Contemporary Muslim Community

Ghannouchi consistently stresses the need for democracy in the Muslim community in his discussions. He mentions that Islamic communities, despite the differences of political environments and the failure of several attempts, have to establish an Islamic government based on democratic principles in response to authoritarian regimes and endeavour to revive the Islamic community. Democratic power-sharing is a non-violent approach

49. Ghannouchi, *Al-Dīmuqrāṭiyyah*, 59–60.

50. Ghannouchi, *Al-Hurriyat al-Ammah*, 87–88.

to effect a transition to Islamic rule.⁵¹ The party that Ghannouchi co-founded, the Ennahda Movement, is a concrete translation of democratic power-sharing. The party defines itself as a “democratic political party with an Islamic frame of reference and a national platform.”⁵² Even with the struggles faced, the party has survived many circumstances and challenges thus far.⁵³

For minority Muslim communities in non-Muslim governments, he suggests that they participate in the establishment of a secular democratic regime. They must try to establish a just government that is close to the Islamic government in a non-Islamic community even if it is not possible to implement all of the principles of Islam.⁵⁴ In so doing, their living conditions and living standards would be better than the situation under occupation. According to Ghannouchi, Islamic democracy is more suitable as a political model for Muslims living in the 21st century than a Caliphate model because it is “the authentic and realistic position. The notion of *khilāfah* (caliphate) is not a religious one as some groups claim. It reflects a period of time.”⁵⁵ To him, democracy is the only way for the contemporary Muslim world to prevent the community from being destroyed by all forms of evil and satanic ideologies.

Critiques towards Ghannouchi's Views on Islam and

51. Rachid Ghannouchi, “From Political Islam to Muslim Democracy: The Ennahda Party and the Future of Tunisia,” *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 5 (September /October 2016): 67.
52. Ivesa Lubben, “Farewell to Political Islam?” *10th Conference of the Tunisian Ennahda Party*. Qantara.de, retrieved from <https://en.qantara.de/content/10th-conference-of-the-tunisian-annahda-party-farewelltopolitical-islam> (accessed 7 November 2020).
53. For more, see Anne Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 95–101.
54. John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito, *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 311–319.
55. Mahan Abedin, *Tunisia: The Advent of Liberal Islamism—An Interview with Rashid Al-Ghannouchi*. London, 30 January 2011, <https://english.religion.info/2011/01/30/tunisia-the-advent-of-liberal-islamism-an-interview-with-rashid-al-ghannouchi/> (accessed 28 October 2019).

Democracy

On the question of Islam and democracy, the attitudes towards the issue can be divided into two schools: one that accepts the idea and the other that rejects it. Ghannouchi's position is one that supports a modern Islamic democracy. Consequently, he has earned many criticisms from within and outside Islamic circles which can be divided into three groups: first, rejectionists from Islamic quarters, representing conservatives and some radical religious forces that adopt a negative view of any shape or form of democratic system; second, Islamists who accept democracy but hold some concern towards Ghannouchi's stand; and third, Secularists, who believe that religions should be separated from politics. The criticisms towards Ghannouchi and his confutations will be discussed in the part that ensues.

Rejectionists' Critiques of Rachid Ghannouchi's Views

The Rejectionist group represents those who believe in the irreconcilability of Islam and democracy at all costs and regard democracy as forbidden (*ḥarām*). The spectrum of accusations has been as diverse as the following:

Democracy is a System of Blasphemy (Nizām al-Kufr)

The belief that democracy differs from Islam in all aspects: "in the source from which it came, the creed from which it emanated, the basis on which it has been established and the thoughts and systems it has brought."⁵⁶ It further argues that democracy is applied to rule people for the people by the legislation of the people. The basis of the democratic system is that people possess the right of sovereignty, and it is constituted by men rather than

56. Abdul Qadeem Zalloom, *Democracy is a System of Kufr. It is Forbidden to Adopt, Implement or Call for It* (London: Al-Khilāfah Publications, 1995), 34.

the *Sharī'ah*. It is thus a blasphemous system. Therefore, Muslims are forbidden to get involved in it.⁵⁷ Those who espouse such an ideology are *al-Jamā'at al-Jihādiyyah* (jihādi groups) and *Ḥizb al-Tahrīr* (HT in acronym and translated as Party of Liberation).⁵⁸

Democracy Assigns Partners with God (Shirk bi-Allah)

Such a criticism is similar to the previous accusation. The rejection stems from the idea that the right of legislation belongs to God, whereas democracy allows people to participate in divinity by enacting their laws which is contradictory to divine sovereignty. Such a form of system is considered as assigning partners with God (*shirk bi-Allah*) which is contrary to tawhid (monotheism). Therefore, participation in the democratic system is forbidden. One such person who adopts such an ideology is Ayman Zawahiri.⁵⁹

Ghannouchi is an Innovator (mubtadi‘) and an Apologist (i‘tidhārī)

Such an allegation is premised on the disagreement of Ghannouchi's approach in dealing with both the Western civilisation and the Islamic heritage⁶⁰ as well as his attempts at making excuses for the West despite their negativity of Islam. An innovator is defined as "... one who introduces something new (*iḥdāth*) on any random principle without having any basis

57. Ibid, 36.

58. The group *Ḥizb al-Tahrīr* (Party of Liberation)—an international, pan-Islamist political organisation which states its aim for the re-establishment of the Islamic Caliphate to unite the Muslim community—was founded in 1953 in Jerusalem by Taqiuddin al-Nabhani (1909–1977), an Islamic scholar from Palestine who published a book titled *Democracy is a System of Kufr* (*Democracy is a System of Blasphemy*) that strengthens the view that Islam and democracy are incompatible.

59. See his book, Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Bitter Harvest: the Muslim Brotherhood in Sixty Years*, Nadia Masid trans. (Cairo, unpublished, 1991).

60. Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi*, 184.

in the recognized foundations and tenets of Islam.”⁶¹ In their interpretation, an innovation of something new in religious matters is forbidden, and the innovator may be judged as an infidel. Since democracy is a new issue that is neither mentioned nor stated in the Qur’ān or the Sunnah, legitimising it and referencing it to Islam like Ghannouchi does, is considered as an innovation. As a result, he has been prohibited by some Salafi groups from joining events due to his belief. Moreover, some members regard him worse than infidels.⁶²

Ghannouchi Serves Western Schemes

As the democratic system is a fruit of Western civilisation, Muslims who are against the ideologies and thoughts that emerge in the West are not willing to adopt any form of the Western political system in a Muslim society. The West and their western ideology have been widely blamed for the failure of Islamic countries.⁶³ Ghannouchi’s critics fear that Western systems would give greater damage to the original form of Islam. Due to Ghannouchi’s stand, he has been accused of being brainwashed by Western civilisation. He is said to alter Islamic thought to the Western idea by claiming they are flexible and reconcilable. The concepts of democracy and public liberties that he brings forth are not rooted in Islam. In addition, Ghanouchi is said to have tried to distort the original Islamic definition such as *maṣlahah* and *ijtihād* with a hidden intention to “turn Islam upside

61. Cenap Cakmak, *Islam: A Worldwide Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (California: ABC-CLIO, LLC), 252.

62. They attempted to veto decisions for inviting him to talk to students and members in the Muslim community in the United Kingdom. Sheikh Faīṣal, who claims to be a leader of the so-called *jihādī* trend in the United Kingdom, is alleged to have told Muslim students in Swansea in March 1997 that those who believe in a democracy such as Rachid Ghannouchi are worse than Christians and Hindus. See: Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi*, 184.

63. Charles Kurzman, *The Missing Martyrs: Why there are so few Muslim Terrorists?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 92.

down.”⁶⁴ Moreover, the prevailing belief is that democracy is a Western conspiracy, and as such, has to be completely avoided. Consequently, Islamic thinkers who call for it in the Muslim world are regarded as serving Western interests. In his views, Ghannouchi tries to force the political Islamic concepts to be agreeable with Western terms, for instance, *shūrā* which means the participation of the citizen in the government has been distorted to become parliamentary democracy; *ijmā‘* has been interpreted to become public opinion, and *maṣlahah* turned to be the liberal notion of utility.⁶⁵

Ghannouchi's Confutations

In Ghannouchi's confutation to the criticisms, he argues that the cause for denying democracy is a lack of understanding in the essence of Islam and its historical development. Should Muslims have a deeper understanding, a comprehensive perception of its nature could make one accept democracy. Hence, Muslims need to get a better education in the Islamic classical texts and history.⁶⁶ A discussion of Ghannouchi's confutations to his criticisms ensues in the following section.

God's Rule and Democracy

In response to those who believe that democracy is a system of blasphemy and consider it to be assigning partners with God, Ghannouchi argues that Islamic heritage has to be interpreted with a deeper understanding, rather than with simplicity and shallowness. For example, complex political issues such as *Hukm Allah* (God's rule) cannot be simplified as Islamic government

64. Mahmud Abdelkarim Hasan, “Radd Ifīra‘at ‘Alā al-Imām Ash-Shātībī” (Refuting False Allegations Attributed to Imam Ash-Shatibi), *Al-Wa‘y* 88 (1995): 23.

65. Abdul Rashid Moten, “Democratic and *Shūrā*-based Systems: A Comparative Analysis,” *Encounters* 3, no. 1 (March, 1997).

66. Ghannouchi, *Al-Dīmuqrāṭīyyah*, 137.

while *Hukm al-Sha‘ab* (people’s rule) understood as democracy. The concept of God’s rule does not mean that God has to come down directly to govern humanity, but through a divine legislative revolution carried out by the governor’s powers. Thus, in Islamic democratic nature, God’s rule can be inferred to be people’s rule by their representatives *Ahl al-hall wa al-‘aqd* (the people who loosen and bind)⁶⁷ as in the Islamic tradition in which power is limited by the *Sharī‘ah*.⁶⁸ Ghannouchi explains that,

Those who proclaim that sovereignty belongs to God do not mean to suggest that God rules over the affairs of the Muslim community directly, or through the clergy. For there is no clergy in Islam, and God cannot be perceived directly, nor does He dwell on a human being or an institution that can speak for Him. What the slogan “sovereignty belongs to God” means is the rule of law and government by the people.⁶⁹

Application of Farāghāt (space) for Ijtihād

Ghannouchi discusses the theory of *farāghāt*—the plural of *farāgh* or space—in his attempt at responding to Muslims who reject democracy in general and for those who specifically accuse him as an innovator. The essence of the theory is that Islam leaves spaces for humans to interpret, modify and act according to needs within Islamic guidelines. The conditions of times and places have to be taken into consideration. Some Qur’ānic verses are misinterpreted to mean that there are ready-made

67. “The people who loosen and bind” is “a term used in political aspects of Islam that refers to those qualified to appoint or depose a caliph or another ruler on behalf of the Ummah.” Emile Tyan, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 263–264.

68. Rachid Ghannouchi, interviewed by Azzam Tamimi, London, June 1995. As mentioned in Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi*, 185.

69. Rachid Ghannouchi, *Muqārabāt fī al-‘Imaniyyah wa al-Mujatama’ al-Madani* (London: al-Markaz al-Magharibi lilbuhuṡh wa al-tarjamah, 1999), 155.

solutions for every single issue in Islam, and Muslims should not look for answers anywhere else but in the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. These verses have been quoted for this matter: "This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion,"⁷⁰ and "Nothing We have omitted from the Book."⁷¹ Even though Islam only provides broad guidelines for most of the questions, Muslims have to fill in the logical answers themselves so as to be appropriate with the situations of specific times and places.

Besides, Islam encourages Muslims to acquire solutions within Islamic guidelines. He gives an example of the discovery of petroleum in the Arabian Peninsular that came about after hard work of exploration.⁷²

Western Design

Ghannouchi views the importance of Muslims to interact with and learn from other civilisations while keeping their own identity. The notion that all inventions and experiences of non-Muslim civilisations should simply be discarded or ignored has to be avoided. This notion, he held, was responsible for the oppression of the nations and the destruction of civilisation. Islam is not an obstacle to development and modernisation. Muslims should benefit from Western accomplishments in the fields of government and administration while institutionalising Islamic political concepts such as *shūrā*, *ijmā'* and *al-'amr bil-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*. The Islamic model of democracy will arise out of the marriage between Islamic ideals and democratic tools for the purpose of achieving justice. Ghannouchi strongly believes that comprehension of values of western modernity

70. *Al-Mā'idah* (5): 3.

71. *Al-An'ām* (6): 38.

72. Rachid Ghannouchi, "*Al-Dīn wa al-Siyasī fī al-Islām*" (The Religious and the Political in Islam) lecture at Cardiff Islamic Society, U.K., January 1997. As mentioned in Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi*, 187–190.

such as democracy and human rights would also motivate Muslims to search for implementation of the same values in Muslim civilisation.⁷³

Conservative Islamists' Concerns regarding Rachid Ghannouchi's Views on Islam and Democracy

Several Islamic observers have expressed concern toward Ghannouchi's stand toward liberal democracy. The cause of their worry does not stem from the belief of incompatibility of Islam with democracy but from the implication of Ghannouchi's thought, because the liberal democratic procedures may inherit inappropriate or unsuitable philosophical components or ideology. Hence, it is not possible to separate procedures from their philosophical ideology and may put the Muslim world at risk.

On this account, they believe that the mix between secularism from Europe and the Muslim world has led to the distortion of government that is neither based on tradition nor democracy as a result of a combination of the worst elements from both systems. Moreover, it may cause dictatorship in the Muslim world.⁷⁴ Despite Ghannouchi clearly distinguishing between philosophy and procedures in his discussions, their concerns remain. One such Islamist who points this out is Abdelwahab El-Messiri.⁷⁵

Another aspect of the issue is that the process of democratisation has to be taken into account before applying to any society. Gradual changes in economic, social and

73. Rachid Ghannouchi, "The Participation of Islamists in a Non-Islamic Government," trans. and ed. Azzam Tamimi (London: Liberty for Muslim World Publications, 1993), 51–63; Robin Wright, "Islam and Liberal Democracy: Two Visions Of Reformation," *Journal of Democracy* 7, no. 2 (1996): 73–74.

74. Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi*, 213.

75. Abdel Wahab El-Messiri, interviewed by Azzam Tamimi (London, 26 October 1996) in Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi*, 214.

political circumstances requires a long period of time before democratisation and pluralisation takes place since they are new to the Arab world. Thus, the situations are different.⁷⁶

Secularists' Critiques

Several secularist writers, who argue in favour of wholesale adoption of Western liberal system, strongly believe in the irreconcilability of Islamic values with secularist values such as democracy and modernity. As a result, Ghannouchi has been criticised by them on several grounds. Firstly, Ghannouchi is criticised for his ambiguity and evasiveness on the question of democracy. According to them, the democratic procedures are completely different from *shūrā*. Secondly, Ghannouchi's partial acceptance of democracy has led his critics to claim that liberal democracy "leads to corruption, moral decay, deviation, and exploitation."⁷⁷ His partiality demonstrates his confusion between accepting and denying whereas democracy has to be fully accepted or fully rejected. Thirdly, his attempt at enforcing the reconciliation of two incompatible ideas as both Islam and democracy are distinct from each other in visions, values, or historical development. A book by Haydar Ibrahim Ali⁷⁸ is a typical work in this regard.

Ghannouchi's Point of View

Ghannouchi literally views liberal democracy as being not the ideal model of democracy, but he has a strong conviction that the Islamic model of democracy can be the combination of Islamic

76. See for instance, Nūr al-Dīn al-Waididī, "Taqdīm Kitāb al-Hurriyyat al-ʿAmmah Fī al-Dawlah al-Islamiyah," *Al-Insan* 3, no. 13 (December 1994).

77. Haydar Ibrahim Ali, *Al-Tayyarāt al-Islamiyah wa-Qadiyāt al-Dimuqratiyah* (Islamic Currents and the Question of Democracy) (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wahdah al-ʿArabiyyah, 1996), 249.

78. An ex-Marxist and prominent figure within the self-exiled Sudanese opposition.

values and procedural democracy. At the same time, Muslims can adopt liberal democracy for the time being, as a practical model while developing their own model in Muslim civilisation. As for irreconcilability, the belief that both systems are rigid and unexchangeable is indefensible. In fact, Ghannouchi's thought is based on his search for the common points in both Western and Islamic cultures that allow Muslims to keep their Islamic principles and simultaneously learn, benefit and integrate the Western culture to establish an Islamic democratic system of their own.⁷⁹

Conclusion

Ghannouchi holds democracy as the closest system to the Islamic political approach and the most suitable political model in the Muslim contemporary world. He believes in the reconciliation of objectives of the *Shari'ah* and democracy in every regard whether in the higher objectives of the *Shari'ah* as the purpose to serve human interests, or in practice and tools such as *shūrā* and *ijtihad*. To him, democracy is not just an ideology, but is more of a set of practical tools and mechanisms designed to control government power and protect the rights of citizens. With the application of democracy, the Muslim world will be able to thrive and gain a strong foothold in societies.

His contribution to modern Islamic thoughts lies in his emphasis on the need for democracy and his proving of the compatibility between Islam and Western thought in matters concerning the system of government which emanate from his comprehension of both traditional Islamic heritage and modern Western concepts. As such, he encourages Muslims to enhance their understanding of Islamic teachings and history in order to understand Islam comprehensively.

79. Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi*, 209.

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