

THE RISE OF “MUSLIM DEMOCRACY”

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A specter is haunting the Muslim world. This particular specter is not the malign and much-discussed spirit of fundamentalist extremism, nor yet the phantom hope known as liberal Islam. Instead, the specter that I have in mind is a third force, a hopeful if still somewhat ambiguous trend that I call—in a conscious evocation of the political tradition associated with the Christian Democratic parties of Europe—“Muslim Democracy.”

The emergence and unfolding of Muslim Democracy as a “fact on the ground” over the last fifteen years has been impressive. This is so even though all its exponents have thusfar eschewed that label¹ and even though the lion’s share of scholarly and political attention has gone to the question of how to promote religious reform within Islam as a prelude to democratization.² Since the early 1990s, political openings in a number of Muslim-majority countries—all, admittedly, outside the Arab world—have seen Islamic-oriented (but non-Islamist) parties vying successfully for votes in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan (before its 1999 military coup), and Turkey.

Unlike Islamists, with their visions of rule by *shari’a* (Islamic law) or even a restored caliphate, Muslim Democrats view political life with a pragmatic eye. They reject or at least discount the classic Islamist claim that Islam commands the pursuit of a *shari’a* state, and their main goal tends to be the more mundane one of crafting viable electoral platforms and stable governing coalitions to serve individual and collective interests—Islamic as well as secular—within a democratic arena whose bounds they respect, win or lose. Islamists view democracy not as something deeply legitimate, but at best as a tool or tactic that may be useful in gaining the power to build an Islamic state. Muslim Democrats, by

contrast, do not seek to enshrine Islam in politics, though they do wish to harness its potential to help them win votes.

The rise of the Muslim Democrats has begun the integration of Muslim religious values—drawn from Islam’s teachings on ethics, morality, the family, rights, social relations, and commerce, for example—into political platforms designed to win regular democratic elections. Challenges and setbacks will almost surely complicate the process, and the outcome is far from certain. Yet the ongoing dynamics of democratic consolidation, more than the promise of religious reform and ideological change, are likely to define the terms under which Islam and democracy interact in at least several Muslim-majority lands.

The past decade and a half has witnessed open electoral competition for legislative seats in Bangladesh (1991, 1996, and 2001); Indonesia (1999 and 2004); Malaysia (1995, 1999, and 2004); Pakistan (1990, 1993, and 1997); and Turkey (1995, 1999, and 2002). The length of this electoral era and the changes that it has set in train allow us to go beyond a “snapshot” of Muslim political preferences in order to track broader trends. Such trends suggest the shape of things to come among the political parties and platforms that will most likely dominate the strategic middle ground of politics in these Muslim-majority countries (or that, in the case of Pakistan, would dominate absent military intervention).

A brief rundown of results is suggestive. In Pakistan in 1997, the right-of-center but non-Islamist Pakistan Muslim League (PML) won 63 percent of the seats in parliament, marginalizing the Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami (JI). Similarly, in 2001 the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) captured 64 percent of the seats in parliament to sideline Bangladesh’s own JI. In Turkey in 2002, the Justice and Development Party (AKP)—a group with roots in the world of Islamism but which has always abjured such Islamist hallmarks as the demand for state enactment of *shari’ah*—won 66 percent of the seats in parliament; voters had a clear Islamist alternative before them in the form of the Felicity Party, and turned it away with no seats. In Indonesia in 2004, a cluster of center-right Muslim parties, the National Mandate Party (PAN), National Awakening Party (PKB), United Development Party (PPP), plus Golkar (the old ruling party), won 53 percent of the seats, as compared to 8 percent for the Islamist Prosperous Justice Party (PKS). In Malaysia in 2004, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) won 49.7 percent of the seats while the Islamic Party (PAS) managed to pick up only 3.2 percent.

Such results suggest that in these Muslim societies, the “vital center” of politics is likely to belong neither to secularist and leftist parties nor to Islamists. More likely to rule the strategic middle will be political forces that integrate Muslim values and moderate Islamic politics into broader right-of-center platforms that go beyond exclusively religious concerns. Such forces can appeal to a broad cross-section of vot-

ers and create a stable nexus between religious and secular drivers of electoral politics.

Muslim Democrats can begin from an Islamist point of departure, as is the case with Turkey's AKP, but may spring as well from nonreligious parties: Consider Pakistan's PML or Malaysia's UMNO. Not all those who have sought to stake a claim to the middle in Muslim politics have succeeded: In Pakistan, the military toppled the PML government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. But the trend is clear, and so far seems to be a case of practice outrunning theory. Muslim Democracy rests not on an abstract, carefully thought-out theological and ideological accommodation between Islam and democracy, but rather on a practical synthesis that is emerging in much of the Muslim world in response to the opportunities and demands created by the ballot box. Parties must make compromises and pragmatic decisions to maximize their own and their constituents' interests under democratic rules of the game.

In working more on the level of campaign-trail practice than of high theory, Muslim Democracy somewhat resembles Christian Democracy. The first Christian Democratic party was founded in southern Italy in 1919, decades before the theological rapprochement that the Catholic Church made with democracy around the time of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s.

Liberalism and Consolidation

Muslim Democracy does not always flow from ideas of Islamic moderation, and it may not always act as a liberalizing force. In some cases, Muslim Democratic parties have backed Islamist demands for stricter moral and religious laws (Pakistan in the 1990s, Bangladesh since 2001) or sought to remove limits on Islamic schools (Turkey since 2002). Yet even such overtures to Islamism should be seen as strategic moves aimed at dominating the middle. The extent to which Muslim Democrats have backed the enforcement of Islamic law or restrictions on women and minorities has seemed to be less a matter of deep ideological conviction than of deals made to win votes in societies where conservative Islamic mores run strong.

The depth of commitment to liberal and secular values that democratic consolidation requires is a condition for Muslim Democracy's final success, not for its first emergence. As was the case with Christian Democracy in Europe, it is the imperative of competition inherent in democracy that will transform the unsecular tendencies of Muslim Democracy into long-term commitment to democratic values.³

Rather than arguing for changes in or fresh glosses on Islamic teaching as the path to democracy, Muslim Democrats are in the streets looking for votes and in the process are changing Islam's relation to politics. The shifts that Muslim Democracy will spark in Muslims' attitudes to-

ward society and politics will come not from theoretical suppositions, but from political imperatives. The rise of Muslim Democracy suggests that political change will precede religious change.

Evidence now in from the Muslim world can help to identify the contours of Muslim Democracy, what it stands for, who supports it, and what factors have governed its evolution, its successes, and its failures. Muslim Democracy is a nascent force about which much remains to be learned.

Islamist ideology, which has dominated political debates from Malaysia to Morocco for a quarter-century, calls for the creation of a utopian Islamic state that notionally vests all sovereignty in God. This call is based on a narrow interpretation of Islamic law, and promotes an illiberal, authoritarian politics that leaves little room for civil liberties, cultural pluralism, the rights of women and minorities, and democracy. The Islamist surge since the Iranian Revolution of 1979 has led many to argue that well-organized and determined Islamists will use democratic reforms in Muslim-majority societies to seize power (probably through one-time elections) and impose theocracy. Democracy, the argument goes, should therefore wait until liberalization via ideological and religious reform can blunt the Islamist threat.

The assumption here has been that the key historical process which will lead to democracy in the Muslim world is an intellectual one, a moderation of the Islamist perspective, or more broadly, perhaps even an Islamic Reformation. While some reformists and moderates have been influential, more often than not their efforts have lagged behind the ground-level political realities that have been the growth medium of Muslim Democracy. It has not been intellectuals who have given shape to Muslim Democracy, but rather politicians such as Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Pakistan's Nawaz Sharif, and Malaysia's Anwar Ibrahim and Mahatir bin Mohamad. They are the ones grappling with key questions surrounding the interaction of Muslim values with democratic institutions, the nature of Muslims' voting behavior, the shape and location of an "Islamic" voter base, and the like.

One should also note that the rise of Muslim Democracy has occurred at the same time as a steady increase of religious consciousness within Muslim-majority societies.⁴ The recent "greening" of Muslim societies, in other words, has led not to votes for Islamists but rather to something that looks at least somewhat like the early stages of Christian Democratic politicking in twentieth-century Western Europe. There are substantial differences, of course. Muslim Democracy, unlike Christian Democracy, cannot measure itself against an authoritatively expressed core of political and religious ideas that transcend national boundaries under the aegis of a centralized religious hierarchy such as the Vatican's. Muslim Democrats, not surprisingly, lack a clear, unified message. They seem instead like the inchoate offspring of various ad hoc alliances and pragmatic decisions made in particular political circumstances. Their

provisional and experimental character, however, may be one of the reasons for their success: Free of heavy intellectual baggage, they can move nimbly with the changing tides of electoral circumstance. At the same time, the degree of commonality seen across Muslim Democratic movements in countries as far apart as Malaysia and Turkey underlines the likelihood that Muslim Democracy really is a major trend and not just a cluster of unrelated political accidents.

Still, the differences are important too. In each land, the Muslim Democratic experiment has proceeded more or less independently. In Turkey and Malaysia (as in precoup Pakistan), Muslim Democracy is a winning electoral formula that has yet to fully articulate a vision for governing (and it was failures of governance—especially rampant corruption—that helped set the stage for the Pakistani coup). In Indonesia, Muslim Democracy is less a platform and more a space wherein a number of parties are struggling to strike the right balance between secular politics and Muslim values. In Bangladesh, it is still only an ad hoc political alliance between right-of-center and Islamist parties that has captured the middle but has yet to resolve its own internal political and ideological differences.

Experiments with Muslim Democracy could eventually produce a more coherent political platform and Muslim political practice. What is notable at this stage is less what Muslim Democracy has said about Islam and more what has been achieved at the polls. The Muslim Democratic movements could become more like one another, or they could begin to take diverging paths. Muslim Democracy could prove an independent force for moderation within Islam, or it could come to seem a reflection rather than a shaper of society's religious values. For all these reasons, it will bear close scrutiny in the years ahead.

Key Factors

The rise of Muslim Democracy has depended on the interplay of several factors. First, Muslim Democracy has surfaced in countries where democracy emerged after the military formally withdrew from politics, but remained a powerful player *de facto*. (In Malaysia the military is not a political actor, but the ruling UMNO has played a similar role through its use of extensive authoritarian powers.) The gradual democratic openings in Turkey since 1983 and in Pakistan during the decade between the reigns of General Zia ul-Haq (d. 1988) and General Musharraf (r. 1999–) were episodes in which the military shaped the opportunity structure in the democratic arena.

Military involvement in politics had three notable effects. First, it limited the Islamists' room to maneuver. Second, it gave all parties an incentive to avoid confronting the military while angling for advantage within the democratic process. Finally, the military's meddling in poli-

tics led to more elections, political realignments, and shifts in coalitions, accelerating and intensifying experimentation with new political formulas. Interestingly, the net effect of all this—a boost for Muslim Democracy—was the same in both Turkey, where the military strongly defended secularism, and Pakistan, where the military worked with Islamists. Turkey's Islamists learned to adopt pragmatic policies to avoid the generals' wrath, while Pakistan's right-of-center PML saw Muslim Democracy as the means to strengthen a frail system of elected civilian rule and the party's own standing within it.

Both the AKP and the PML sought to reduce military pressure on politics through a readiness to compromise with the generals as well as through efforts to build broader coalitions that the generals would hesitate to confront. The PML's success was one of the things that led the Pakistani military to stage its 1999 coup aimed at, among other things, stopping Muslim Democracy. The upshot, tellingly, has been that the seat share of Islamist parties in parliament has risen sharply from its negligible 1997 level of less than 1 percent to 20 percent in 2002. By removing the Nawaz Sharif government—and with it Muslim Democracy—General Musharraf has strengthened the Islamists, whether he meant to or not.⁵

While the Indonesian and Bangladeshi militaries have been more circumspect, each has also helped to nudge Islamists and right-of-center parties to explore Muslim Democracy. Malaysia is unique in that change there came not at military prompting, but from within the ruling party. In the 1980s, UMNO's control over national politics allowed it to restrain Islamists with one hand while using the other to reach out systematically to Muslim voters. The Malaysian case aside, it seems clear that Muslim Democracy is more likely to emerge when Islamist and democratic forces sense a common interest in protecting the democratic process from the military.

Second, Muslim Democracy has emerged in societies where the private sector matters. The less state-dependent and more integrated into the world economy a country's private sector is, the more likely is that country to see Muslim Democracy gain traction as a political force. Muslim Democracy, in short, needs the bourgeoisie, and the bourgeoisie needs Muslim Democracy. Muslim Democracy combines the religious values of the middle and lower-middle classes with policies that serve their economic interests.

In Turkey, the success of AKP's Muslim Democratic platform is less a triumph of religious piety over Kemalist secularism than of an independent bourgeoisie over a centralizing state. To understand the rise of Muslim Democracy in Turkey, one must consider the economic-liberalization policies of Prime Minister (later President) Turgut Özal (d. 1993) in the 1980s and the vibrant, independent private sector that they made possible. Similarly, Indonesia's Suharto regime in its later years mixed

state support for moderate Islam with engagement in global trade. The same trend was evident in Malaysia, where the UMNO government combined economic globalization with promotion of a nationalist and moderate Muslim political platform that would support those economic policies. While Bangladesh and Pakistan lag behind Turkey, Indonesia, and Malaysia in terms of participation in global trade, they too boast robust private sectors that exert growing political influence. Yet the deeper involvement in the global economy and the greater independence of the Turkish, Indonesian, and Malaysian private sectors seem to correlate with the more Islamically moderate character of Muslim Democracy in those countries as compared to Pakistan or Bangladesh.

In addition to the military dynamic and the economic dynamic, a third motor of Muslim Democracy seems to be the existence of strong competition over votes. With no one party able easily to dominate the process, all parties feel pressed to act pragmatically. The presence of multiple parties with strong organizational structures and political legacies (some dating back earlier than the democratic opening) in turn fosters competition. Despite sustained bouts of military rule or one-party dominance in all these countries, multiparty politics has retained its vitality in each, and parties have bounced back as political processes have opened.

Regular competitive elections have both pushed religious parties toward pragmatism and pulled other parties into more diligent efforts to represent Muslim values. The net effect is to reward moderation. The game is to win the middle. This is the politics of what electoral experts call “the median voter,” around whose position on the issue spectrum majorities cluster. Competition over the Muslim electorate means that non-Islamist groups can integrate those who vote based on Muslim values into broader platforms and wider coalitions than Islamists are capable of marshaling. In 1990s Malaysia, for instance, the UMNO successfully competed for the urban and middle-class Muslim vote and thwarted challenges by the Islamist PAS. At about the same time, the PML was doing much the same thing to the JI in Pakistan.

In Muslim-majority countries where the factors listed above do not exist or are weak, the prospects that Muslim Democracy will emerge are much lower. Yet even in such societies, the activities of Muslim Democrats elsewhere may prove relevant to local political discussions. In particular, if and when Muslim Democracy gains coherence, it will become readier for export to countries unable to produce it from scratch. Muslim Democracy can travel. In the 1990s, Pakistan’s PML consciously sought to imitate Malaysia’s UMNO. More recently, the rise of the Turkish AKP has been noted in Arab circles, secular, official, and Islamist alike. In Egypt, the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood has been keenly watching developments in Turkey, and some within Brotherhood ranks have begun taking measured steps toward the middle. In Algeria, it is the

government that has been encouraging the Turkish model by trying to push the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) to start acting more like the AKP.

The rise of Muslim Democracy suggests that the values of Muslims—which are not to be confused with the demands of Islamists—can interact with practical election strategies to play the main role in shaping political ideas and driving voter behavior.⁶ In the end, Muslim Democracy represents the triumph of practice over theory, and perhaps of the political over the Islamic. The future of Muslim politics is likely to belong to those who can speak to Muslim values and ethics, but within the framework of political platforms fit to thrive in democratic settings.

After 1945, Christian Democracy sought to change Catholic attitudes toward democracy in order to channel religious values into mass politics.⁷ Christian Democracy drew on Catholic identity, but also related it to social programs and welfare concerns. Christian Democrats provided the means for conservative religious values to find expression in secular politics. The rise of Christian Democracy reflected the desire of Church leaders to provide a voice for Catholic views in democracies, but it was also the result of strategic choices by political actors who saw opportunity in mobilizing religious values to further their political interests.⁸

Similar forces are now at work in some Muslim-majority countries, with ripple effects that will likely be felt throughout the Muslim world. Like the Catholic Church in the last century, Islamic-oriented parties are grasping the need to relate religious values to secular politics. As was also the case in Europe, secular parties and politicians are sensing the benefits of including appeals to religious values in their platforms. Thus Muslim Democracy, like Christian Democracy before it, is emerging as a political tendency that is strongly tied to both the democratic process and the use of direct appeals to the concerns of religious voters.

Limits and Potential

Considered together, the cases of Pakistan and Turkey point to the limits as well as the potential of Muslim Democracy. They help us to discern what is driving the rise of Muslim Democracy, what it stands for, whom it represents, and what challenges it faces. Ironically, Turkey has moved in a more liberal direction even though its Muslim Democratic party springs from Islamist roots, whereas in Pakistan the push toward Muslim Democracy that the non-Islamist PML began has been cut short by a military takeover. Economic factors figure prominently in both cases, and in both the military has played a large role, albeit with vast differences between one case and the other.

In Pakistan, 1988 saw a period of military rule come to a close with the mysterious midair death of General Zia, whose regime had mixed authoritarianism with Islamization. The main prodemocracy force at the time was the secular-leftist Pakistan People's Party (PPP). To limit PPP

gains in the 1988 elections and guard their own interests, the departing generals cobbled together a PML-Islamist coalition called the Islamic Democratic Alliance (IJI).

Between 1988 and 1993, the power struggle between the PPP and the IJI plus the military's continued meddling transformed right-of-center politics into more than a tool for keeping civilian institutions weak. In 1990, the IJI won the elections after the military dismissed the PPP government. As the IJI's several parts, now secure in government, began to pursue their own respective agendas, the coalition frayed. The PML and the Islamists both began to sense a chance to dominate Pakistani politics as never before—under conditions of elected civilian rule. The PML moved first, distancing itself from both the generals and the Islamists (who remained close to each other) to wage the 1993 election campaign on its own with a platform that promised economic growth while placating nationalist and Muslim sensibilities. The latter strategy involved stealing such staples of Islamist rhetoric as the call for the enforcement of *shari'a*—although to please its more secular supporters the PML never did more than gesture at this goal.

Although the PPP wound up winning the October 1993 parliamentary elections, the PML's gambit succeeded at least in part. The party carried the Muslim vote and pushed IJI to the margins with a dismal showing. This was the first time in the Muslim world that political maneuvering within a competitive electoral process had put a brake on Islamism. The next election, in 1997, only made the trend more evident as the PML returned to power with almost two-thirds of the seats in the National Assembly while the Islamists found themselves reduced to their smallest parliamentary contingent ever. To achieve this, the PML had cast itself simultaneously as a modern democratic party that was committed to the development of Pakistan and as the standard-bearer of Islamic identity—the latter a claim bolstered by the PML's success in taking over seats once held by avowed Islamists.⁹ As is shaping up to be the case in Turkey today, it was the promise of Islamic legislation rather than its fulfillment that proved a sufficiently popular formula.

Between 1993 and 1999, the PML continued to push a mixture of business-friendly economic policies and nationalist-cum-Islamic appeals. Infrastructure development and globalization went hand-in-hand with a nuclear-weapons program, confrontations with India, and rhetorical support for Islamic legislation. Balancing the demands of the various constituencies at which these postures were severally aimed was the PML's challenge. Business interests supported peace with India, for instance, while nationalists and Islamists wanted a tougher stance. As the 1990s wore on, such tensions began to undermine the PML's appeal to its Muslim-minded voter base and gave the military angles to play against the party in advance of the 1999 coup.

It was the PML's very success, however, that set the stage for its fall.

The generals began to worry that the party's strategy—which we can now see was a rough-and-ready version of Muslim Democracy—would actually succeed. There followed Musharraf's 1999 coup against Sharif and the systematic dismantling, under military tutelage, of the PML. When Musharraf allowed controlled elections to be held in 2002, Islamists did spectacularly well, rebounding all the way up to a best-ever 20 percent vote share. While Musharraf, especially since 9/11, has postured as Pakistan's sole bulwark against radical Islamist rule, a more accurate statement of the facts would say that the military did full-bore Islamism a huge favor by yanking the PML from power and stopping the country's uncertain yet real progress toward Muslim Democracy.

Turkish Trailblazers

In Turkey, the 1990s were a decade of struggle between Islamists and the military. Turkey's powerful military, unlike Pakistan's, did not support Islamist activism, and was restrained in its actions by its own commitment to democracy, economic reform, and European Union (EU) dictates regarding the rule of law.

The end of a bout of direct military rule in the early 1980s had opened the door for Islamists to enter politics. In 1987, Necmettin Erbakan organized the Welfare Party (RP) to marshal Islamist support among the lower and lower-middle classes as well as the booming independent private sector. By 1994, the RP was winning municipal races in Istanbul and Ankara. A year later, it took 22 percent of the vote in national parliamentary elections. In 1996, the RP formed a governing coalition with the secular True Path Party. Erbakan became prime minister of Atatürk's militantly secular Kemalist republic.

The Turkish military, long the fierce keeper of Kemalism's secular-nationalist flame, was not reconciled to an Islamist ascendancy. Beginning in early 1997, the generals launched what Cengiz Çandar has dubbed a "postmodern coup," manipulating the courts and the parliamentary process to upend Erbakan's government.¹⁰ The RP found itself under a formal ban for transgressing the constitution's secularist red lines. Some of the party's activists tried to organize a new formation called the Virtue Party, but in 2001 that too was banned. Right-wing and especially nationalist parties stepped into the resulting gap by including appeals to traditional Muslim values in secular platforms. The lesson was not lost on Islamist politicians.

The military's politico-judicial strike against the Islamists split the Muslim-values bloc. In 2002, a group of younger Islamist politicians under Erdoğan—the onetime mayor of Istanbul who had just served a jail term on charges of inflaming religious passions—broke with Erbakan to form the AKP, leaving the Virtue Party's traditional-Islamist rump to rename itself the Felicity Party. The November 2002 elections

were an AKP romp, as the party won a clear plurality of the popular vote and a huge majority of the seats in parliament.¹¹ Felicity won a scant 2.5 percent of the vote nationwide, well short of the 10 percent needed for parliamentary representation.

Many AKP members once belonged to the Welfare and Virtue parties. Yet there are also middle-class and lower-middle-class elements with no history of Islamist ties. In many ways, the AKP is less an extension of Welfare and Virtue than a reconstruction of the center-right, economically liberal Motherland Party (ANAP) of Turgut Özal, the architect of Turkey's bold plunge into democracy and the global economy in the 1980s.

More than two years into its rule, the AKP is still an electoral strategy in search of a governing agenda. It lacks a clear platform, much less a fully thought-out approach to the role of Islam in politics. And yet its experience so far is important in several respects. First, it is a case in which Islamist activists embraced a process of moderation and pragmatic change. Second, it highlights the factors that govern the rise of Muslim Democracy. Third, it gives us the best picture we have so far of what Muslim Democracy might become and what it might stand for. Then too, the AKP's case tells much about the tensions that inhere in the development of Muslim Democracy, the consolidation of its political position, and how it can contribute to the institutionalization of liberal democracy.

The AKP is the brainchild of Virtue Party moderates, led by Erdoğan, who concluded that Turkey's military would never allow an overtly Islamist party back into power, and—still more importantly—that the ban on Islamic parties was helping other right-of-center parties such as the Nationalist Action Party, which had come to hold nearly a quarter of the seats in parliament by 1999. Erdoğan and his colleagues realized that there was a robust base of Muslim-minded voters, and that the military would never allow an Islamist party to tap that base. Consequently, the AKP presented itself as a center-right party that appealed to Muslim values only indirectly, through the medium of more generically traditional values. By sublimating Muslim-minded politics into a broader appeal to traditional and conservative values in a society where the political center of gravity is on the center-right, the AKP was able to put together the wide support base that became the launching pad for its rocket ride to power in 2002.

Part of this skillfully executed effort involved crafting appeals that traveled across class lines. The AKP is popular in Istanbul and Ankara slums where Islamists have become known for their efficient management of social services such as law enforcement, sewage disposal, and trash pickup. The AKP watchword of “conservative democracy” (the phrase that Erdoğan prefers to “Muslim democracy,” in part to allay military and EU fears that he might be a theocrat in a necktie¹²) also

appeals to the “Anatolian tigers”—the pious and prosperous Muslims of the new private sector, whose “green capitalism” forms the basis of the independent bourgeoisie.¹³ To keep those with more traditional Islamist leanings on board, the AKP is often more vociferous on secular matters (such as criticism of Israel) than on their purely religious concerns.

The Burdens and Limits of Power

The AKP must now master the challenge, common to all democratic parties, of balancing a set of divergent constituent demands within a single winning platform. Power and its responsibilities arguably make this harder. The urban poor like populist economics. The business community wants tightly managed fiscal and monetary policy that meets EU admissions standards.

Many AKP voters expect the party to tackle contentious symbolic issues such as the current ban on women’s headscarves. With an eye on their conservative and nationalist supporters who do not necessarily favor overtly religious politics, AKP leaders shied away from the headscarf issue, and instead endorsed a bill that would criminalize adultery, for the former seems more like a purely “Islamic” issue while the latter can be called a matter of upholding “traditional values.” Yet even here the AKP has faced problems: When the EU strongly objected to the adultery bill, the AKP quickly dropped it. The emphasis on “conservative” as distinguished from “Muslim” democracy in AKP parlance is also meant to help position the party as a potential partner for the Christian Democratic parties of the EU nations. What the AKP actually stands for, in short, is being worked out gradually as the limits of the possible become clearer. This degree of pragmatism sits uneasily with the AKP’s highminded Islamic idealists (the party’s very name in Turkish forms an acronym for “pure,” “unsullied,” or “honest”), but Erdoğan’s personal popularity and the Islamic credentials of the party’s founders have helped to bridge the gap.

Since taking office, the AKP has shown more interest in strengthening democracy than in delivering on the demands of its most Muslim-minded supporters. This approach may signal a shift from a state-centered to a society-centered perspective, from a strategy of struggling to capture state power on behalf of Islam to one of seeking to foster a civil society and a deeply rooted democratic order that together will embody Muslim values and limit state power.

This has meant serving the interests of private business, pursuing full EU membership, and deemphasizing the most Islamist aspects of the party’s agenda—in other words, promising to create a space within which Muslim values can express themselves, but not pushing an Islamist legislative agenda. As it leads Turkey toward the EU, the AKP is now able credibly to present itself as the country’s great champion of modernization—and as such has entered into a *de facto* competition with

the military, which has long claimed that title for itself. In keeping with this, the AKP is increasingly engaging in the de facto promotion of what social theorists call “differentiation,” as the party’s actions, omissions, “body language,” and actual language all seem to be recommending a distinction between the private practice of Islam (encouraged) and its public expression or imposition (approached shyly and with caution, if not abjured outright).

A strongly felt need to keep the military at bay no doubt underlies much of the AKP’s strategy. Sensing this, the party’s more pious supporters are giving it latitude as it avoids and postpones dealing with Islamic issues. The party also tells the faithful that a “soft” approach to Islam will ensure closer ties between Turkey and Europe. Europe alone has the capability to build institutional boundaries around the military and to protect Turkish democracy. Since liberal democracy is far more receptive to religious expression than is Kemalist secularism, Muslim-minded voters can see an interest in not pushing too hard for their favorite policies now, in hopes of strengthening Turkey’s ties to Europe and with them Turkish liberal democracy. Although it is quite likely that Europe too will look unfavorably on drives for certain types of Islamic legislation, the EU will also perhaps do so somewhat less strenuously than will the Turkish military. And of course the Anatolian tigers and the rest of the AKP’s private-sector base strongly favor closeness to Europe as a key to Turkey’s hopes for prosperity.

As we have seen, the AKP currently has rather limited room for strategic choice, stuck as it is between its various groups of supporters, the Kemalist military and state establishment, and the Europeans. And yet that choice is pushing the party to define the middle in Turkish politics in terms of conservative values that embrace broader Islamic values and concerns, but which are not limited to narrow interpretations of Islamic law. Erdoğan’s refusal to let the AKP be called a “Muslim” party bespeaks a large measure of sincerity as well as a dash of calculation.

Will the AKP’s gambit succeed? Will the party prove itself able to establish a coherent definition of Muslim Democracy (with or without the actual name) that can channel a politics of Islamic concerns and aspirations into liberal-democratic channels? The answers will come not from the realm of theory and ideology, but from that of pragmatism and politics. Competitions for power—and the calculations to which these competitions give rise—are promoting continual and far-reaching change, regardless of whatever the AKP’s original intentions may have been. In the ironic realm of history, even the winners often build other than they know. The result will be “secularization” as Martin Marty once defined it: “a complex set of radical religious changes, in which people act and think religiously in ways which differ from those of the past.”¹⁴ This is also the process that Stathis Kalyvas identifies in the development of European Christian Democracy, wherein unsecular

political positions, once subjected to the pressures of competition, gradually adapted to the values and rules of democracy.

Turkey presents perhaps the most developed instance of Muslim Democracy, but the process is in evidence elsewhere as well. Even at this early stage it is clear that the sheer competitive logic inherent in open politics is driving Muslim Democracy forward, especially in places where gradual democratization has ensured the continuation of that competition through repeated elections. Established parties, a robust private sector, and an ongoing democratic process (even a rough and troubled one) are the ingredients that need to be in the mix if Muslim Democracy is to put down roots and blossom. Muslim Democracy offers the Muslim world the promise of moderation. As Islamists find themselves facing—or caught up in—the Muslim Democratic dynamic, they will find themselves increasingly facing the hard choice of changing or suffering marginalization.

For an example of what such change might look like, consider a recent *fatwa* (religious decree) that the Shi'ite Muslim ayatollah Ali Sistani issued ahead of the 30 January 2005 elections in Iraq. Sistani sought to impress upon women their religious duty to vote even if their husbands forbade them to do so. Sistani is well known as a major backer of a unified Shi'ite-candidates' list. Evidently the imperative of notching a big win in the elections—more than any arguments about religious reform or women's rights—compelled the most senior Shi'ite religious leader in Iraq to advocate not only the enfranchisement of women, but even their right (or as Sistani would probably prefer to put it, their specific duty in this case) to disobey their husbands.¹⁵

Finally, it is Muslim Democracy—and not the creaky and brittle authoritarianisms by which the Muslim world is so beset—that offers the whole world its best hope for an effective bulwark against radical and violent Islamism.¹⁶ Muslim Democracy provides a model for pragmatic change. That change will in turn be the harbinger, not the follower, of more liberal Islamic thought and practice.

NOTES

1. After the November 2002 Turkish elections, some in the West began extolling the Justice and Development Party of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as a group of “Muslim Democrats” not unlike the Christian Democrats. See, for example, Radwan A. Masmoudi, “A Victory for the Cause of Islamic Democracy: An American Muslim Analyzes the Surprise Election in Turkey,” www.beliefnet.com/story/116/story_11673_1.html. While I plainly think that Masmoudi was on to something, I should note that Erdoğan himself has taken pains publicly to disown the “Muslim Democrat” label and to embrace the idea of “conservative democracy” instead. See Erdoğan's remarks in Vincent Boland, “Eastern Premise,” *Financial Times* (London), 3 December 2004.

2. See John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, and Daniel

Brumberg, eds., *Islam and Democracy in the Middle East* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

3. Stathis Kalyvas, "Unsecular Politics and Religious Mobilization," in Thomas Kselman and Joseph Buttigieg, eds., *European Christian Democracy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 293–320.

4. Genevieve Abdo, *No God But God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Bahtiar Effendy, *Islam and the State in Indonesia* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2003); Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Islamic Leviathan: Islam and the Making of State Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

5. Vali Nasr, "Military Rule, Islamism, and Democracy in Pakistan," *Middle East Journal* 58 (Spring 2004): 195–209.

6. Saiful Mujani and R. William Liddle "Politics, Islam, and Public Opinion," *Journal of Democracy* 15 (January 2004): 109–23.

7. José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 5–39.

8. Stathis Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 2–4.

9. As Nawaz Sharif once put it, he wanted to be "both the [Turkish Islamist leader Necmettin] Erbakan and the [economically modernizing Malaysian prime minister] Mahatir of Pakistan." Author's interview, Lahore, Pakistan, October 1997.

10. Cengiz Çandar, "Postmodern Darbe" (Postmodern coup), *Sabah* (Istanbul), 28 June 1997. See also Cengiz Çandar, "Redefining Turkey's Political Center," *Journal of Democracy* 10 (October 1999): 129–41.

11. Ziya Öniş and Fuat Keyman, "Turkey at the Polls: A New Path Emerges," *Journal of Democracy* 14 (April 2003): 95–107.

12. As Erdoğan put it to one interviewer, "[W]e are conservative democrats. . . . our notion of conservative democracy is to attach ourselves to the customs, traditions, and values of our society, which is based on the family. . . . This is a democratic issue, not a religious issue." Vincent Boland, "Eastern Premise," *Financial Times* (London), 3 December 2004.

13. Hakan Yavuz, "Opportunity Spaces, Identity, and Islamic Meaning in Turkey," in Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 270–88.

14. Martin Marty, *The Modern Schism: Three Paths to the Secular* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 108.

15. This *fatwa*—apparently spoken rather than written—was reported from Baghdad by *Newsweek* correspondent Rod Nordland in a dispatch on the Iraqi elections dated 30 January 2005. Nordland wrote that "Sistani's *fatwa* ordered Shia women to vote, even if their husbands told them not to." See www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6887461/site/newsweek. Nordland and Babak Dehghanpisheh reported in a dispatch dated 14 February 2004 that every third candidate on the Shi'ite list that Sistani helped to create was a woman. See www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6920460/site/newsweek.

16. Alfred Stepan and Aqil Shah, "Pakistan's Real Bulwark," *Washington Post*, 5 May 2004, A29.