The Divergent Trajectories of Political Islam in Turkey and Indonesia

1. Introduction

Participation matters. Credible elections provide Islamist political parties incentives to moderate their agendas and to build cross-cutting coalitions in order to retain power. They demonstrate that Islamists can be responsible democratic actors and that they will not renege on the promise of holding future elections once in office. Sham elections, by contrast, cause Islamists to exit the democratic process nearly completely. Under such conditions, clandestine extremism and violence have proliferated. This paper draws on case study evidence from Turkey and Indonesia in support of these arguments.

I trace the divergent trajectories of political Islam in both these countries through five additional sections and a conclusion. In section two, I examine the debate over Islam's compatibility with democracy. Section three focuses on institutions. The fourth and fifth sections relate the recent history of politics and political Islam in Turkey and Indonesia. The sixth section advances my argument in detail. Finally, in my conclusion, I deal with some of the assumptions behind this comparative analysis and consider how it might be improved.

2. Islam and Democracy

This paper directly engages a heated debate over the compatibility of Islam and democracy. It ultimately suggests that it is not Islam but rather institutions and Islamists' experiences with them that determine the success of democracy in Muslim countries. In this section, I look at some of the external (Western) and internal (Muslim) discourses on Islam

and democracy, the fate of individual rights under Islam, and the level at which we engage this debate.

External Discourse

There are more than one billion Muslims in the world and underlying the Islam and democracy debate is a real fear by some that they hate freedom. Daniel Pipes, a well known polemic and founder of the Middle East Forum has argued that there are no moderates within Islam and constructed a picture of "Fundamentalist Islam" that is "aggressive," in search of "universal dominance," "anti-Western," and "anti-democratic."[1] Samuel Huntington has similarly posited a "clash of civilizations" between the West and Islam. He holds that Western ideas like "individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, [and] the separation of church and state" have little resonance in Islamic cultures. [2] Pipes and Huntington present a monolithic view of Islam, Islamic countries, and Muslims that does not recognize the diversity of belief and experience within these categories.

Internal Discourse

The Qur'an itself does not specify a form of government for the Muslim umma, but it and the history of the early caliphates do suggest "ideas of representation, consultation, and legal process"[3] consistent with modern democracy. Two modern scholars, Khaled Abou El Fadl and Abdolkarim Soroush, have advanced different arguments supporting democracy on the basis of Islam.

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[1] p. 2
[2] p. 40
[3] Abou El Fadl, p. 11

Khaled Abou El Fadl's core concern is to reconcile the need states have to make laws with the prohibition in Islam against substituting "human authority for God's sovereignty."[4] Abou El Fadl begins from the premise that Islam and democracy are defined by "their underlying moral values and the attitudinal commitments of their adherents – not by the ways that those values and commitments have been applied."[5] He then goes on to demonstrate the ways in which democracy is best at upholding justice and mercy, the core values of Islam. Abou El Fadl considers humans to be viceregents of the divine on Earth and writes, "When human beings search for ways to approximate God's beauty and justice, then, they do not deny God's sovereignty; they honor it. It is honored as well in the attempt to safeguard the moral values that reflect the attributes of the divine. If we say that the only legitimate source of law is the divine text and that human experience and intellect are irrelevant to the pursuit of the divine will, then divine sovereignty will always stand as an instrument of authoritarianism and an obstacle to democracy. But that authoritarian view denigrates God's sovereignty."[6]

Abdolkarim Soroush is a prominent Iranian dissident who argues for the compatibility of Islam and democracy on a different basis. Soroush posits that "no understanding of Islam is ever complete or final" and "dismisses any attempts to formulate an official Islamic political ideology."[7] He is convinced that ideology restricts the growth of religious knowledge and that religious peoples will necessarily produce religious governments through their values. For Soroush, democracy is the only form of government that offers

[4] p. 2
[5] Ibid.
[6] p. 5
[7] Vakili, p. 151

sufficient protection against these forces. He believes that democracy "is compatible with multiple political cultures, including Islamic ones."[8]

For Abou El Fadl, democracy is the best way to realize the ideals of Islam. His argument relies on a paradigm shift that focuses on values rather than historical practice. This is an exceptionally creative approach, but, for a community grounded in a legal culture, the lack of precedence weakens its appeal substantially. Soroush's arguments hold more weight, I think, because they are more subtle. Rather than arguing for a new approach, Soroush shows how Islamic regimes have not upheld Islamic precepts and clearly explains why he feels democracies may actually do better through a series of straight theological arguments. Abou El Fadl's views represent a Sunni's perspective on Islam and democracy while Soroush's reveal those of a Shi'a.

Individual Rights under Islam

It is difficult to make any concrete predictions on the fate of individual rights in Islamic states. First, Islam has historically afforded protection for individual rights on a case by case basis through legal proceedings and not through sweeping state mandates. For this reason, Abou El Fadl notes, "Muslim jurists did not imagine a set of unwavering and generalizable rights that are to be held by each individual at all times."[9] Furthermore, those rights specifically identified in the Qur'an have tended to deal with the protection of property or taxation, issues also connected to legal proceedings. It is on this basis that Islamic society has been divided into four separate classes – Arab Muslims, non-Arab

[8] Ibid., p. 160
[9] Abou El Fadl, p. 16

converts, Peoples of the Book, and slaves – with different sets of obligations. These obligations, however, do not necessarily reflect different rights.[10]

Second, most Muslim-majority states that exist now have a distinctly Islamic character and the rights of individuals, particularly women and religious minorities, vary widely within them. For instance, women in Egypt are not required to veil in public yet in Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait they are. In Turkey, women are actually prohibited from veiling in universities and government offices. Also, Christians, Hindus and Sikhs can practice their faiths openly in Pakistan, but they cannot do so in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Indonesia only recognizes five religions – Islam, Hinduism, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Buddhism – making it difficult for people of other faiths to obtain national identification cards. In each of these instances, the rule that dominates is justified by a particular interpretation of Islam.

Scholars from different cultures have applied the Qur'an's command for the Muslim umma to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong (3:110) differently depending on their local circumstances.[11] There is no reason to think that a uniform opinion would emerge if there were a greater number of Islamic states. In the future, states are likely to have different incentives and concerns which will direct their decisions to protect or restrict rights. Islam may provide a partial basis for these decisions, but it is unlikely to be the sole basis.

Level of Engagement

There are two reasons we should engage the question of Islam's compatibility with democracy at the empirical level rather than ideological level. First, ideological disputes

[10] About El Fadl notes that some early Muslim jurists did distinguish between classes when dealing with issues of compensation and torts, however, he argues that the Qur'an does not distinguish between the sanctity of a Muslim and non-Muslims. See p. 17-18, especially footnote 21.
[11] Cited in Esposito, p. 29

cannot be resolved with finality. For every argument there is a counterargument and a rebuttal. Ideologies are complex and how people relate to them depends on their personal identities and circumstances. Second, among the 57 Muslim-majority nations that comprise the Organization of Islamic Conferences, a number have had long or sustained periods of democracy.[12] Some of these include Albania, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Turkey, and Uzbekistan. In short, there is ample data to do both close case studies and large-N comparisons that hold Islam as a constant. We have the ability to search systematically for salient mechanisms which determine the success of democracy across Muslim nations.

3. Institutions

I rely on institutional analysis in constructing my arguments. Douglass C. North has defined institutions as "the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, the humanly derived constraints that shape human exchange, whether political, economic, or social."[13] I am primarily concerned with two types of institutions: political parties and democratic electoral systems. I focus on Islamist political parties for two reasons: (1) Islamist political parties are considered uniquely suspect when it comes to their commitment to repeating elections after they have won power, and (2) Islamist political parties claim to represent an authentic strain of Islam that uses the Qur'an as a blueprint for governance. The perception and the claim that Islamist political parties represent the true nature of Islam provide a

[12] See http://www.oic-oci.org/ for a full list of OIC members.
[13] p. 3

robust test for the compatibility of Islam and democracy. In the course of analyzing Islamist political parties, I also explore their relationship with their core supporters. I focus secondly on democratic electoral systems – the repetition of free and fair elections over time – because they determine whether parties believe elections are credible. If parties believe elections are credible, they will remain within the system. If they do not, they will exit the system and eventually turn to violence to accomplish their aims.

4. Turkey

Turkey is a secular republic with a history of credible, multi-party elections since the 1950s. It arose from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1923 and was built according to the vision of one man, Mustafa Kemal also known as *Ataturk* ("Father of the Turks"). Ataturk was a military general who had led Turkish forces during the War of Independence. He feared Islamist influence in the new state and countered it deliberately by making the Turkish military the formal guardian of secularism. His beliefs continue to shape the practice of Islam in Turkey today. A March 2005 article in *The Economist* noted:

> [Ataturk] was so suspicious of clerics of all kinds that he brought the church firmly under the state's control. He made the Christians' Sunday into the day of rest, and nobody has suggested that it revert to the Muslim holy day of Friday. The democratic republic's Directorate of Religious Affairs decides where mosques shall

> be built, employs their *imams* and on occasion tells them what to preach. It also lays down rules on the sort of religious education to be given in schools.[14]

Until recently, the Turkish military held veto power on the National Security Council and played a decisive role in identifying and quashing threats to secularism and national stability. The military has taken power by coup on four occasions: twice to counter Islamists, once to suppress Kurdish separatism, and once to resolve legislative conflict between communists and fascists. Although the military has forcefully seized power and closed all political parties repeatedly, in each instance its rule has been restricted to a few years and it has supported open elections under new but still qualitatively fair and transparent rules. Military service is compulsory in Turkey and public support for secularism is strong. Accordingly, the majority of Turks approve of the military. In 2003, as part of the Copenhagen criteria established for Turkish entry into the European Union, the military voluntarily ceded its place on the National Security Council. This effectively ensured civilian control of the military and removed the formal mechanism for military coups.

Turkish political parties are centralized and personalized. The 1965 and 1983 Political Parties Laws fix the organizational structure of parties and prevent their mobilization below the subprovince level. This vests power in the hands of elites. Ergun Özbudun writes:

> All parties are overly centralized, and the central executive committees have the power to dismiss recalcitrant local committees. Changes in the top leadership are rare and are caused only by exceptional circumstances. Bülent Ecevit (the DLP), Necemettin Erbakan (the WP), and Alparslan Türkes (the NAP) have led their

[14] See "Which Turkey?," The Economist, March 17, 2005.

> parties for more than a quarter century; and Süleyman Demirel remained leader of the JP and TPP from 1964 to 1993, when he was elected president of the republic.[15]

Centralization and personalization have meant that most parties operate in a top-down fashion. Islamist parties, however, have been able to organize practically at the grassroots level through their close connections to charitable foundations and other organizations. Jenny White describes the connections that existed between the Welfare Party and civil society the late 1990s:

> The Welfare Party presided over a network of independent, interlocking support groups that was the envy of all other parties. In addition to the party's formal representation at the provincial, municipal, and neighborhood levels, informally linked associations and groups rooted the party in every block, in every street. This organizational level had been achieved in almost every province of the country, so that the Welfare Party activists could boast that there was no place they could not reach with their election message.[16]

Recent political developments in Turkey provide a positive example of how democratic politics can moderate Islamist ideology through iterated learning. Founded in 1984, the Welfare Party was the first Islamist venture to compete on a wide scale. According to R. Quinn Mecham, "Major themes of Welfare's campaigns included the importance of social justice, Turkey's exploitation by the West, religious freedom, ethnic tolerance, promotion of private enterprise, creation of an interest-free 'Islamic' economy, an end to state corruption, and denunciation of an 'imperialist Zionist system' that threatens Turkey's

[15] p. 83
[16] p. 180

national independence."[17] In the 1994 municipal elections, Welfare averaged 19 percent nationwide and won the mayoral posts in the two largest cities, Ankara and Istanbul. A year later, Welfare captured 21 percent of the parliamentary seats in a national election. As a result, it became part of a coalition government and Necmettin Erbakan, its leader, became the first Islamist Prime Minister in 1996.[18]

Once in power, the Welfare Party had a difficult time pursuing its Islamist agenda. At the local level, Welfare politicians placed restrictions on the sale of alcohol, increased mosque construction, and changed local symbols and landmarks to make them more religious.[19] At the national level, however, Erbakan found his agenda thwarted by the compromises he was forced to make in order to retain power. In early 1997 in response to growing Islamist influence in Turkish society, the military demanded "the closure of hundreds of religious schools, tight controls over religious brotherhoods, and restrictions on Islamic dress" from Erbakan.[20] He could not accede to these demands politically and was forced to resign. In the following months, the Constitutional Court investigated the Welfare Party for dividing the Turkish public along religious lines and it was closed.

The Virtue Party effectively succeeded the Welfare Party and immediately faced institutional constraints on its activities, including the possibility of military intervention, the fear of legal closure by the courts, and the need to maintain and expand its electoral constituency.[21] As a result, the Virtue Party strategically shifted its message from issues related to Islam to the need for real democracy, the importance of human rights, and the

[17] Mecham, p. 7
[18]Ibid., p. 6
[19] Ibid., p.8
[20] Ibid., p. 10
[21] Ibid., p. 18

expansion of political liberties.[22] It initially lost ground in national elections and fell into the role of leading the opposition in parliament. Virtue also found itself embroiled in controversy when one of its female members refused to remove her headscarf in the National Assembly. After these events, it took a number of steps to moderate its public image, such as pushing proposals to help Turkey gain entrance to the European Union, appointing women to its governing board, and calling for the military to take stronger action against Hizbullah after a round of militant assassinations.[23] These steps may have been successful, but in the end they were for naught. The leadership within the Virtue Party fragmented into two wings and in 2001 the courts ordered the party closed "because it was deemed a focal point for Islamic militancy."[24]

The AK Party emerged successfully as one of the fragments from the Virtue Party. In 2002 it competed in national elections on a broad populist platform that included support for entrance to the European Union, a market economy for Turkey, and an end to corruption. It won over 34 percent of the vote and almost two-thirds of the seats in parliament. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Welfare Party's mayor of Istanbul, led the party in the elections and became Turkey's Prime Minister afterwards. Mecham argues that "one of the reasons for the AK Party's success is that strategic decisions made by party leadership after iterated periods of learning have transformed the dominant Islamist movement in Turkey into a politically sophisticated, progressive, and moderate participant in normal politics."[25]

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[22] Ibid., p. 12
[23] Ibid., p. 16
[24] Ibid., p. 17
[25] p. 4

5. Indonesia

Although Islam played an important role in the formation of the Indonesian state, the state itself has had a difficult relationship with political Islam. During World War II, Japanese forces occupied the Indonesian archipelago and allied themselves with locals against Dutch colonials. In an effort to foment an independence movement, the Japanese consolidated Muslim organizations into Masyumi ("Consultative Council of Indonesian Muslims") and trained ulama in politics and military tactics. When the Japanese withdrew from Indonesia in 1945, however, they backed a nationalist general, Sukarno, and not Masyumi figures, in the declaration of independence. Sukarno quickly promulgated Pancasila ("The Five Principles"), a nationalist ideology aimed at unifying the people, and this later became enshrined in the Indonesian constitution. Pancasila includes: "social justice, a just and civilized humanity, belief in one god, Indonesian unity, and government by deliberation and consent."[26] Religion, therefore, came to be a part of Indonesian governance, but not the basis for it.

Indonesia formally gained independence from the Netherlands in 1949. It may have been a state in name, but the center did not have a monopoly on violence. Separatist movements under the banner Darul Islam were already active in West Java, Central and South Sulawesi, and Aceh and had declared their own Islamic state a year earlier in 1948. Heavy fighting between separatists and the military continued through 1962 when the movement's primary leader was captured. Meanwhile, in 1955, Sukarno supported free and fair elections which solidified a three-way split among nationalists, communists, and Islamists in the country. In 1957 facing chaos in the Constitutive Assembly over whether to

[26] See Kinsbury p. 363

change the national ideology from Pancasila to Islam, Sukarno introduced "Guided Democracy." This scheme gave the military a role in protecting the stability of the state. Masyumi resisted Guided Democracy and grew increasingly resentful of Sukarno's close ties to the communists. In 1960, Sukarno banned Masyumi for supporting a regional rebellion and in 1962 a number of its leaders were jailed.

Against the backdrop of Islamist separatism, a plummeting economy, and Sukarno's deteriorating health, six army generals were abducted and killed on 30 September 1965. Lower ranking army officers participated in the murders and were believed to have had assistance from communist party members in plotting a wider coup. Sukarno empowered his loyal general Suharto to crush the communists and eventually ceded control of the government to him in an effort to restore order. From 1965 – 1970, Suharto used the military and former Darul Islam supporters to crush the communists. The Defense of Democracy group has estimated there were more than 1.5 million political deaths in this period.[27]

Suharto allowed a series of elections under his regime, but they were neither free nor fair. Golkar, a corporatist organization of bureaucrats, inevitably won strong majorities even though it was not technically a political party. Initially, four definitively Muslim political parties were allowed to participate in Suharto's highly orchestrated elections, but in 1973 these parties were consolidated into one, the PPP ("United Development Party"). In 1977 the PPP was required to drop its electoral symbol, a picture of the Kabah shrine in Mecca, and in 1984 all political parties were required to use Pancasila as their sole ideological foundation. Starting in the mid-1980s, Suharto combined his suppression of Islamic political activity with a new openness towards the personal practice of Islam. He permitted women to

[27] Ibid., p. 370

wear the hijab in schools, strengthened the Islamic courts, eliminated the lottery, created an Islamic bank, and made the Hajj with his family.[28] Indonesia bore the brunt of the Asian Economic Crisis from 1997 – 1998 prompting massive street demonstrations and Suharto's transfer of power to his deputy BJ Habibie, Habibies's transfer to Abdurrahman Wahid, and the elections of 1999, the first credible elections in more than forty years.

In spite of or because of Suharto's suppression of political Islam, support for Darul Islam never faded. In 1980, inspired by the Iranian Revolution, a core group of students on Indonesian campuses and in peasantren ("madrasas") resurrected the cause. A peasantren in Ngruki in the Solo region of central Java became a focal point for the rejuvenated Islamist movement. One of its primary teachers, Abu Bakar Bashir, was imprisoned by Suharto in 1982 and eventually sought exile in Malaysia. While there, he connected with other Islamists from Singapore and the Philippines and developed the regional Jemaah Islamiyah ("Islamic Community") terrorist network. With Suharto's fall, Bashir returned to Indonesia to spawn the Majelis Mujahidin ("Islamic Fighters Council"), a political wing of JI, which lobbies for shari'a at the Indonesian regional level. He also actively promoted jihad and came to be associated with terrorist attacks in Bali in 2002 and Jakarta in 2003.

The elections of 1999 opened the door to Islamist participation in Indonesian democracy. Initial results showed that combined vote share for Islamist parties had fallen from 45 percent in 1955 to 35 percent.[29] In the 2004 elections, political coalitions shifted and a moderate Islamist party, the PKS ("Prosperous Justice Party") came to power at the center on an anti-corruption platform. While it received 9 percent of the popular vote, the more conservative Islamist party, the PBB ("Crescent Star Party") held steady at its 1999 mark of 2 percent.

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[28] Liddle, p. 614
[29] See "A model of tolerance," The Economist, December 9, 2004.

6. The Argument

In Turkey, the military's strong opposition to militant Islam forced Islamist parties through a cycle of iterated learning. In this process parties had to reinvent themselves and change their leadership. A reactionary vote bank loyal to the Islamist parties emerged early on in Turkish democracy because of bans on personal expressions of piety. This vote bank and the anti-establishment image created by persistent military suppression facilitated the rise of the Welfare Party to power in 1994 on an anti-corruption platform.

In Indonesia, religion always played a role in the state's ideology and personal expressions of piety were allowed. All parties and leaders had a partially Islamic character. The military suppressed Islamists not so much for their religious views but for their separatist inclinations; the authoritarian state had to retain a monopoly on violence. It was Sukarno, first, and then Suharto that churned Islamist parties through a repetitive process of consolidation, ideological purification, and political exclusion that stripped them of their viability and credibility. Although both leaders held elections, these elections were not considered free or fair. These circumstances caused Islamists to exit electoral politics, sustained the underground Darul Islam movement for more than fifty years, and gave birth to Jemaah Islamiyah, a terrorist network now active across Southeast Asia.

Following Suharto's resignation in 1998, credible parliamentary elections were held in 1999 and 2004; in 2004, Indonesians also directly elected their president for the first time. Support for Islamic parties was mixed across these elections with the most conservative Islamist party, the Crescent Star Party, winning about two percent of votes in both contests.

Islamists may now have an entry point into Indonesian democracy, but there are two challenges they face: first, their vote bank is too small to make them a viable option for a strategic voter and, second, the Indonesian political system with its history of sham elections is too young to hold credibility with extremists.

7. Conclusion

The ideology of Islamist political parties is impacted by participation. Moreover, the state's attitude towards Islam influences the size of the core vote of Islamist parties. If Islamists are allowed to participate in repeated free and fair elections, they develop trust in the electoral process. They also face strong incentives to moderate their ideology in order to expand their support base through cross-cutting cleavages. If Islamist political parties are consolidated, stripped of their ideology, and suppressed in a political system that lacks credible elections, they will choose to exit the system. Under such conditions, extreme views and violence intensify.

In Turkey and Indonesia, Islamists have not won a majority of votes and have had to form governments in coalition with other parties. The combination of coalitions and the compromises made have varied. The ability of Islamists to pursue their agendas through these coalitions is determined by the proportion of votes they control. In Indonesia, Islamists have controlled only a small number of votes and have held tightly to their platforms. In Turkey, Islamists have controlled additional votes and have been willing to compromise. There is a clear trade off between political power to be gained and the ability to pursue Islamism.

Indonesia remains in a phase of transitional democracy. Its political parties continue to learn and its electoral rules continue to evolve. It is not plausible to draw conclusions yet about whether the most extreme Islamists will choose to reenter the system. The Turkish experience provides hope, but it may be that the turn towards violence is irreversible.

Conservative Islamist ideology is malleable under certain institutional conditions. This supports my major claim that Islam is compatible with democracy. Institutions, not religion, shape the prospects for democracy in Muslim countries.