Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey

In 2002 the Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) swept to power in Turkey. Since then it has shied away from a hard-line ideological stance in favor of a more conservative and democratic approach. M. Hakan Yavuz, a premier scholar of Turkey, negotiates this ambivalence, asking whether it is possible for a political party with a deeply religious ideology to liberalize and entertain democracy or whether, as he contends, radical religious groups moderate their practices and ideologies when forced to negotiate a competitive and rule-based political system. While the author explores the thesis through an analysis of the rise and evolution of the AKP and its more recent 2007 election victory, his conclusion – that everyday political realities ultimately override ideology and dogma – can be comparatively applied to other Muslim countries facing similar challenges. The book, which tackles a number of important issues including political participation, economics, internal security, the Kurdish question and Turkey's bid to enter the European Union, provides a masterful survey of modern Turkish and Islamic politics, which will be of interest to a broad range of readers from students to professionals and policymakers.

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Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey

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To Tevhide, Neşe, Yasemen and Handan

Indeed, God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves. (Qur'an, 13:11)

I am like a compass. With one foot I stand securely on the foundation of my faith, with the other foot I wander throughout the seventy-two nations of the world. (M. J. Rumi (1207–1273))

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Preface

This book examines the principal puzzle that confronts many Muslim and non-Muslim countries: is it possible for religiously inspired (Islamic) political movements to become agents of democratization and even of liberalization? Or is the adaptation of secular ideas (ideology) and institutions through a process of internal reform and secularization necessary to establish a liberal and democratic system in Muslim societies? In other words this puzzle is closely related to one central question that has been of primary concern to social scientists: what is the connection between religious movements and democracy, on the one hand, and democracy and secularism, on the other? Do prevailing Islamic ideas and norms pose an obstacle to the transition to democracy, as most prominently argued by Daniel Lerner, Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington?

My general contention is that radical religious groups moderate their practices and ideologies when they enter into a competitive and rule-based participatory political system. The political openness characterizing this kind of system leads to reflexivity and a gradual moderation of the interpretation of the religious dogma and of political platforms on the part of religious groups. This process, in turn, allows the log-jam between polarized secular and religious forces to be broken discursively, as each side is now able to engage directly with the other along multiple channels of interaction in political and public spheres, eroding monolithic and homogeneous socio-political blocs. Moreover, a peaceful transition to pluralist and democratic politics is facilitated if two conditions exist: a functioning tax-based liberal economic market, and a porous public sphere that allows for the cross-fertilization of contending values and identities.

Such a development has taken place in some Muslim countries, including Turkey, Malaysia and Indonesia, where major Islamic political movements have eschewed radical ideologies and now embrace democratic platforms. This book examines how and why this substantial transformation in the outlook of Islamist movements has happened. Earlier studies attempting to explain the absence of democratization have focused

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exclusively either on structural factors or on a monolithic and unchanging view of Islamic beliefs and textual understanding. This study seeks to bring structure (socio-political context) and agency (religious leaders and believers) together to explain why and how religious movements can contribute to the processes of democratization and pluralism in Muslim majority states through a dynamic reinterpretation of the religious tradition. The focus of this study will be on the ability of religious actors to reconstruct the meaning of religious texts through hermeneutical approaches, rather than using established religious dogma, in explaining political behavior in the public sphere. The book develops an interactive model of interplay between structural factors such as the type of political system and economic conditions and the ability of believers to reread the religious traditions to respond to new challenges. To this end, the book first identifies structural conditions for the emergence of a liberal religious discourse and then examines the interpretive abilities of embedded religious leaders. The book explains the evolution of liberal political attitudes as a result of the convergence between political convictions, religious hermeneutics, textual exegesis and political/strategic interactions.

In undertaking such a textual- and discourse-oriented humanistic approach, I hope to enhance and move beyond more conventional social science approaches, which focus on socio-economic and structural factors to explain Islamic socio-political movements. In addition to these structural factors, it is important to study the discursive practices of Islamic movements, because Islamic idioms still remain the most potent force of political mobilization in different Muslim countries, due to the lack of a process of secularization as has occurred in the West. This dominant religious discourse not only defines the spiritual and moral understanding of believers, but it also provides guidance to Muslims in different aspects of their private and public life, including politics. Historically, Islam has been among the most visible public religions in terms of its politicization; it has made itself readily available to reformers – and even to revolutionaries – calling for drastic cultural, social and political transformations, as well as to conservatives skeptical of any change in the customs and traditions of their countries. As a result, while Islamic movements in various guises have functioned as the vehicle of democratization in several Muslim countries, depending on the textual, historical, cultural and hermeneutical traditions, they have also emerged as the main obstacle to democratic reforms in many others.

Islamic movements reflect competing visions of community, authority, legitimacy and identity. The Islamization of Turkish political language in the 1980s and 1990s has had a significant implication for the struggle to redefine the nation and the meaning of the good life. Islamic ideas are

injected into the debates over the meaning of nation and political life. Islam with the new media-saturated age became more significant in terms of its ability to provide symbols, networks, myths and identities, to be mobilized for or against real or imagined enemies. At the heart of the Islamic challenge in modern Turkey has been the continuing debate over how to define the public sphere, secularism and the political community. The conflict is between those who want a society based upon a Jacobin secular vision of social and political order – defined by the disestablishment of Islam in the public sphere – and those who embrace an Islamic conception of society and moral order. While the former affirm that the solution for Turkey's problem is modernity without Islam, the latter argue for modernity with Islam.

Islam as the most powerful source of solidarity helps to redefine who is a member of a given community; it offers shared moral values that regulate social order.[1] Thus, Islam, just like other religions, simultaneously homogenizes and differentiates. My study examines the manner in which religious ideas are deployed by social and political groups to enhance their interests, and the subsequent implications these have had for Islam, politics and social order. Since religion and politics are closely engaged in the same issues of normative order, collective identity and legitimate authority, they cannot be separated, as some militant secularists wish for. Indeed, Islamic pronouncements provide a licence to a specific political agenda, and identify it in the best interests of the community to be realized through mass mobilization. Thus, Islam affects the core identity of the ruling AKP and its conceptions of politics and identity.

This study will identify the contextual conditions under which Islamists prefer moderation over confrontation by utilizing the experience of Turkish Islamic groups. The case of Turkey is particularly important due to Turkey's recent experience of co-existence and co-evolution in the matter of the transformation of Islamic movements and the democratization and liberalization of political and economic systems. In Turkey, a group of committed liberal-democrats has emerged from within the ranks of an ostracized Islamic political movement, which has successfully formed a broad democratic platform appealing to a wide range of sectarian, ethnic, social and political forces hitherto marginalized by the Kemalist state. By utilizing the case study of Turkey, I reject an essentialist approach to understanding the politics of Muslim countries. On the contrary, I argue that the transformation of Islamic movements toward a

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[1] Robert Wuthnow defines moral order as "values and norms that regulate and legitimate social institutions." Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order: Explorations in Cultural Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 1.

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genuine Muslim democratic orientation is a vindication of the need for abandoning essentialism, and the outcome of several contextual variables: the ongoing process of liberalization creating competitive political and economic spaces, the growing role of the Muslim bourgeoisie, the expanding public sphere and the inclusion of new intellectuals into the movement. The most important factor in the evolution of a Muslim democratic movement is the rising bourgeoisie and its continued commitment to democratic values as expressed in its support for cultural exchanges and new intellectuals' projects.

The book consists of three sections. In the first section, the introduction raises a number of theoretical questions about the definition and evolution of Islamic parties. It also seeks to explore the conditions under which an Islamic political movement ceases to be Islamic and becomes non- or post-Islamic. I argue that due to three structural factors (political participation, neo-liberal economic policies and the expansion of the market), the Turkish Islamic political movement has evolved to a point that it has ceased to be Islamic. The first chapter examines the context within which the AKP emerged, by focusing on the impact of history and economy on contemporary Turkish politics. This section examines five critical stages of modern Turkish history to understand the connection between democracy and development. It also examines the role of the state and economic policies in the constitution of the Turkish Islamic landscape.

The second section starts with chapter 2 and examines the socio-political origins of the AKP movement. It traces the trajectory of the Islamic political movement, starting from the establishment of the NOM until its culmination as the AKP. It also closely examines the political and social origins of the AKP's split from the VP, marking the historical transformation of the movement into a liberal-democratic force, abandoning its earlier discourse. It also analyzes the conditions that prepared the ground for the AKP's victory in the 2002 elections. The third chapter looks at identity, ideology and leadership issues within the AKP. The fourth chapter examines two prominent leaders of the AKP, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül, and their role in the evolution of the AKP's identity.

The third section consists of 3 chapters. Chapter 5 analyzes the socio-political impact of the AKP government on Turkey's domestic politics, and the new political challenges it has faced during its term in government. It also examines the dynamic interaction between the AKP's policies and its supporters. The main questions to be addressed are: will the AKP convert its electoral majority into a durable electoral base? How will the AKP cope with poverty, secularism and the headscarf issue without confronting the powerful secular forces within the establishment? The

sixth chapter focuses on the most controversial domestic and foreign policy issue: the Kurdish question and the AKP's policies in this field. Chapter 7 examines continuity and change in the making and implementation of Turkish foreign policy. It analyses the EU membership process, the Cyprus issue and US–Turkey relations within the context of Iraq. What guides the foreign policy of the AKP? Is it national/party identity or national/party interests? Is the confusing and fragmented foreign policy of the AKP a reflection of its syncretic identity? Chapter 8 analyzes the causes and political consequences of the 2007 national elections. The book's conclusion reflects the major shift of political grammar in Turkey in terms of ending "two track governments" (the power sharing between the unelected military and the elected politicians) and of stressing human rights discourse.

In short, I call the contemporary transformation in Turkey a conservative revolution for two reasons: the current revolution is led and shaped by civil society; and societal and economic changes have preceded political change. The conservative revolution is a bottom-up transformation in terms of the institutionalization of "politically correct" creole language and new actors. Thus, this is a bottom-up and gradual revolution in society to control the political language and society; and eventually the state.[2] The Islamic groups already control the political society and seek to control the state. With the AKP government, Islam has become the undisputed identity referent of Turkey. The agents of this conservative revolution launched an impressive and multifaceted challenge to the Kemalist status quo by capturing civil society organizations and associations. In short, Sheri Berman is partially right to argue that civil society has become an "incubator for illiberal radicalism."[3] Contrary to the dominant literature on civil society in the Middle East, civil society is not an inherently liberal and tolerant space in which people and associations interact in order to achieve democracy and reform. In the case of Turkey, some illiberal and conservative voices are rooted and fed by civil society associations.

The questions I address in this book have engaged me since 1998. I have addressed some of them before, principally in *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (2003) and *The Emergence of a New Turkey* (2006). I revisit some of the questions here, because my views have continued to develop and

[2] Asef Bayat, "Revolution without Movement, Movement without Revolution: Comparing Islamic Activism in Iran and Egypt," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 40:1 (January 1998), 136–169.
[3] Sheri Berman, "Islamism, Revolution and Civil Society," *Perspectives on Politics*, 1 (June 2003), 257.

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even to change. What I say in this book is continuous with my previous
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Abbreviations

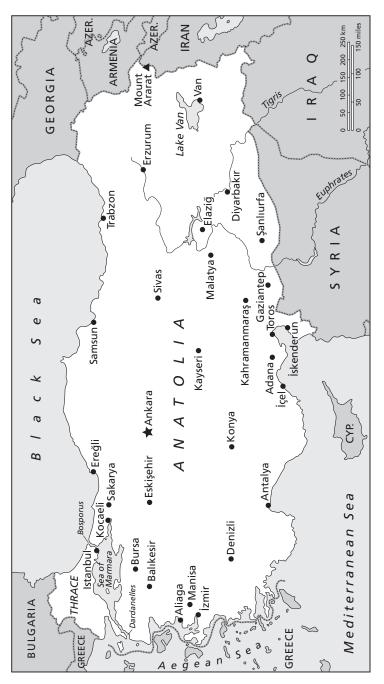|	
AKP	Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*)
ANAP	Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*)
AP	Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi*)
BBP	Greater Unity Party (*Büyük Birlik Partisi*)
CHP	Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*)
DEHAP	Democratic People's Party (*Demokratik Halk Partisi*)
DP	Democrat Party (*Demokrat Parti*)
DRA	Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Baskanlığı*)
DSP	Democratic Left Party (*Demokratik Sol Parti*)
DTP	Democratic Society Party (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*)
DYP	True Path Party (*Doğru Yol Partisi*)
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
FP	Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*)
HADEP	People's Democracy Party (*Halkın Demokrasi Partisi*)
HEP	People's Work Party (*Halkın Emek Partisi*)
MÇP	Nationalist Work Party (*Milliyetçi Calışma Partisi*)
MHP	Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*)
MNP	National Order Party (*Milli Nizam Partisi*)
MSP	National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi*)
MÜSİAD	Independent Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (*Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği*)
NOM	National Outlook Movement (*Milli Görüş Hareketi*)
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan*)
RP	Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*)
RTÜK	The Supreme Board of Radio and Television (*Radyo ve Televizyon Yüksek Kurulu*)
SP	Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*)
TİP	Turkish Workers' Party (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*)
TOBB	Turkish Union of Chambers and Stocks (*Türkiye Odalar ve Borsalar Birliği*)
TSK	The Turkish Armed Forces (*Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri*)
TÜSİAD	Association of Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen (*Türk İş Adamları ve Sanayiciler Derneği*)

Map of Turkey