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**Democracy-Oriented Islamist Party Movements Political  
Attitudes of Islamism: A Brief Historical Perspective  
within Democratization**

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# Democracy-Oriented Islamist Party Movements

## Political Attitudes of Islamism: A Brief Historical Perspective within Democratization

**Dr. Hasan Yucel Basdemir**

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### Introduction

We see today that there is a wide range of problems about the relationship between Islam and democracy. Discussions are going on the media, academia and politics lively. That is due to the high demand for democracy in the Muslim-majority societies. Despite this, there are obstacles in front of settlement of democracy. What are these obstacles? Some say that the main barrier is itself Islam for democracy.<sup>1</sup> The more moderate form of this thesis is that not of Islam, but of the Islam perception among Muslims hinders democracy. Some utter/express this approach in the form that Muslim-majority societies are not ready to adopt democratic values. The second view is that the autocratic and oligarchic governments (despots) in the Islamic geography do not want their powers to lose/abandon and do not allow democracy. (This sometimes manifests itself in the forms of controlled, limited or tutelary democracy). The third view is that the development of democracy is blocked by the powerful states on grounds that it is contrary to their “national interests”<sup>2</sup> thereby an fear of “Islamic extremism” is being created. In punishment from a higher authority, even if you are a member of the ruling class.

Each of these claims can be true to a certain extent provided that the idea that Islam is incompatible with democracy is exempted. In this case, we can suspect that resistance against democracy comes together these three groups:

1. The resistances from religious groups,
2. The resistances from autocrats, and
3. The resistances from foreign forces.

Many academics, journalists and politicians evaluate the Muslim world by looking at a small radicalized minorities; they are not to be able to discriminate between the radical minorities and the main majority.<sup>3</sup> As such, the demands of Islamist parties and the motivations of religious and secular radical groups can not be distinguished from each other. Although the supporters of these three groups being anti-democracy are around 15-20 per cent, they are more apparent than the majorities. Nonetheless, extremist religious groups have tight and closed networks; autocrats, public power; foreign powers also have extremist religious groups and autocrats that they can exploit and implicitly or explicitly direct.

This situation prevents satisfying the demands of democracy in the Muslim world. The rise of democracy tendencies has been being able to lead devastating civil wars and damage to communities as were seen in examples Hama and Humus in 1982; Algeria in 1992; Andican in 2005, Egypt in 2013 and Syria from 2013 to today. In this case, the question we have to answer is: What should be done in the Muslim-majority world to develop democracy from a liberal and peaceful perspective?

Contrary to what is often claimed, the inability to develop democracy in the Muslim-majority societies depends on historical and current events to a large extent, but not on theological reasons even if it was a bit of truth. Muslim territory-originated radicalization and even terror have arisen largely due to the restrictions of individual, economic and political freedoms. The Islamist groups have given different reactions to these restrictions. These reactions has revealed different Islamism portraits from terrorism to liberal values. The most powerful advocates of liberal and democratic values among these portraits are Islamist party movements. To put it more clearly, the only group who gives support to democracy and defends democracy unconditionally is the Islamist/conservative party movements, despite some shortcomings.

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<sup>1</sup> See Charles Rowley and Nathanael Smith, ‘Islam’s Democracy Deficit: Muslims claim to like Democracy, So Why do They have So Little?’, *Public Choice*, 139 (2009): 273–99, p. 298.

<sup>2</sup> See Irfan Ahmad, “Democracy and Islam”, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 37(4) 459–470, p. 467.

<sup>3</sup> See *The Economist’s* Muslim World news for these kinds of failing comments: “The new Arab cosmopolitans Despots are pushing the Arab world to become more secular”, Nov 2nd 2017, Cairo.

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*Do political problems stem from Islam?*

To handle theologically the relationship between Islam and democracy, or to link to the theological reasons the inability to develop democracy is a hasty and just a theoretical allegation, and far from reality. This approach blocks many time us to grasp the truth. Because the knowledge of democracy is practical and gained by experience, and we need to fundamental freedoms for starting this experience.

Theological views are not a barrier to political experiences. On contrary, positive political experiences enhance theological perspectives and improve the religious inclusivism. Negative political experiences such as violations of human rights cause the theological perspectives to get/make narrower and lead to religiously exclusive interpretations. In other words, the reason for radicalization is not the Islamic belief, on contrary, the lack of democracy and the violation of fundamental rights increase/reinforce the radicalized political interpretations of Islam. We will come it back again later, and explain why the theological comments are weak. Now I will describe my thesis, then I will make a classification about political attitudes in the Muslim societies and then I will put my proposal about how can we take a stance against these political ranges. Finally, I will explain/be justified the validity of my proposal/assertion through the titles I have transformed into questions.

## **I. Thesis (a description)**

The wars in the Muslim world incite human rights violations, make more apparent (radicals) and strong (despots) the anti-democratic movements and radical interpretations of Islam. The strengthening radicalism has been given the legitimacing justification to the hands of the autocrats who are the first order responsible from these violations and the most major obstacle for democracy. This leads to a practical vicious circle between democracy and autocracy. To get out of this vicious cycle, this must firstly be regarded as a fundamental political principle: The market system, freedom and democratic values protect individuals from the radicalisation, and keep societies and groups away from radical tendencies; and these lead that inclusive approaches on religion are approved by a vast majority of public.

## **2. Classification**

The political movements in the Muslim world are mainly divided into two groups, as being the religious-based and the secular-based groups. Secularists do not themselves feel safe in Islamic societies because of political instabilities and desinformation about Islam. With the lack of this confidence, they prefer to remain close to the autocrats generally. Islamist groups have different political reactions. War and violations have been transforming some of them into terrorist organizations (like IS, Taliban), some of them into radical groups (like Ekremiler in Ozbekistan), some of them into secret crime organizations (like FETO in Turkey) that hide their

real intentions. Some constitute a civil society not to be in accord with state and lead to a further increasing in the gap and the tension between the state and society (like civil lhvan). Some are pushing the limits to be a part of the political processes and to maintain their legitimacy (political parties: examples from Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Malaysia and Turkey). In general, Islamist groups can be grouped into three groups: (1) secret organization (2) religious extremism and (3) party movements. The third one has the strongest social support. I will entitle these in the term “Islamist party movements”. The most important examples for the party movements are Nahda in Tunisia, UMNO (The United Malays National Organization) in Malaysia and National Opinion (Milli Görüş) in Turkey. They have two main functions: a) preventing radicalization b) reducing the tension between the state and society.

### 3. Proposal

Despite severe violations of human rights, party movements have always been the strongest advocates of democratic values in the Muslim-majority societies. Although they are constantly criminalized by bureaucratic elites, they try to take part in legitimate political processes; they are trying to become a part of the political system instead of radicalization, even though they are kept away from bureaucratic positions by despots. The social base that is inclined to radicalization due to violation of individual, economic and political rights is rehabilitated by making close to political system thanks to Islamist party movements. They are more optimistic than other groups. In addition, they have the highest social base / support having democracy expectancy. Their two most distinctive features are that they stay away from violence and attach importance to political legitimacy. The development of democracy in the Muslim-majority societies depends on the increase of democracy experience in the practice. The Islamist party movements are open to improve/enhance this experience. For this reason, they should be given “a balanced and critical support” as well as selfish and secular groups, but not to approach with suspicion.

*What are the Islamist party movements in the Muslim societies?*

It is difficult to count all the Islamist parties. We can talk about the history of several parties by featuring Turkey experience to explain what is meant with the party movements. With the start of the multiparty life in Turkey in 1950, some Islamists tried to take place in the center-right parties. They have endeavored to become part of legitimate politics in the lines of the Democratic Party, the Turkish Peasant Party, the Republican National Party, the Justice Party and the National Movement Party. Necmettin Erbakan (1926-2011) established the Civil/National Nizam Party in 1970, which was considered as the first broad-based Islamist party in Turkey. He set the slogan of the party as “national/civil vision” (milli görüş) and “fair order” (adil düzen). Then the party was banned in 1971. Erbakan and his friends founded the Civil/National Salvation Party in 1971. After the military coup of September 12, 1980, this party was also closed down and then the Welfare Party was established in 1983. The Welfare Party was removed from power by the “post-modern coup” in the so-called February 28th process in 1997 and closed down in 1998. The Fazilet Party was replaced it in 2001, and the Saadet Party was established instead.

Following the closure of the Fazilet Party, a group led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Abdullah Gül and Bulent Arınç left “civil vision” (milli görüş) and established the Justice and Development Party (AK Party or AKP) in 2001. This new party abandoned “fair order” and “civil vision” discourses and defined itself as a “conservative democrat”. After the 1980 military coup, religious people sought the ways to make politics in other parties such as the Anavatan Party, the Dogru Yol Party and the Milliyetçi Çalışma Party and succeeded in that. Despite the fact that the parties were closed, and bans were imposed to keep politics open, the party movements never approached the violence and blocked the radicalization trends in Turkey.

Mahathir Mohammad’s United Malays National Organization (UMNO) was seen the same function in Malaysia. It is same as Mohammed Arshad’s in Bangladesh and Muslim Brotherhood’s in Egypt and Jordan. Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria, Renaissance Party in Tunisia, Jamiyyat’ul-Eslah in Kuwait, Mohammadiyah and Nahdat

al-Ulema in Indonesia<sup>4</sup> defense democracy. They participate in the elections as allowed. Apart from these, Pakistan has a special place in terms of democracy experience. The three main political parties in the country are: the center-right conservative Pakistan Muslim League-N; the center-left socialist PPP; and the centrist and third-way Pakistan Movement for Justice (PTI). Despite the strong experience of democracy in Pakistan, the parties are weak, and the bureaucrats are strong. For this reason, Pakistan does not go beyond controlled (tutelary) democracy. The Party of Justice and Development (PJD) in Morocco, has won Morocco's two recent parliamentary elections and leads the current government. Bosnia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Kyrgyzstan, Albania, Sudan are other countries with experience of democracy.

*Is it true to label the party movements as Islamist?*

Islamism is a concept used in Europe to define the Islamic Commonwealth (Islamic Union), which began to emerge from the 1820s. Centering on Istanbul, Cairo and Agra, this movement had strengthened as a reaction to European and Russian expansionism. This movement was banned with the 1917 Bolshevik revolution and the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1922. This movement was called Islamism or Pan-Islamism in Europe. The meaning context of this term is defined by the Western media, academia and politicians. Islamism is used today in very different meaning from its traditional one. All groups from the moderate party movements (like Ennahda) to the bloody terrorist movements like al-Shabab and IS are placed under this term.<sup>5</sup> The Economist describes Islamism as follows: "Its current incarnations and hybridizations include groups as diverse as Ennahda, a peaceful Tunisian political party, and Islamic State (IS), a violent jihadist group that calls the Brothers apostates."<sup>6</sup>

To label as "Islamist" both the democratic movements and the terrorist organizations is a clear indication that the conceptualization made about Muslim culture in the West is wrong. This applies to terms such as Islam, jihad, sharia, Islamic law that are attributed pejorative meanings. However, terms are innocent. For Muslims, trying to prevent violence and improving democracy and freedom of religion are also each of jihad.

Party movements in the Muslim geography are closer to conservative and liberal movements in terms of Western political literature, even though they have some Islamic contents in the traditional sense. Today, however, the entire academic literature is settled on the terms "Islamist" or its more moderate form "political Islam". As such, instead of making conceptual analyzes, it seems more useful to use/accept/surrender the term "Islamism" in spite of its vague content, because it is unlikely to be able to correct this misconception that have been settled for many years. I want to call as "Party movements" pro-democracy Islamists for discriminating them from others, especially from violent movements.

*What is the difference between Islam and Islamism?*

Islam is a religion that has references, purposes, beliefs and sanctions for life in this earth and life after death. Tawheed belief lies at the heart of Islam. Tawheed is expressed by the words: "Ashadu al-Lailaha illa Allah va ashhadu anna Mohammadan abduhu va rasuluh" (I bear witness that there is no god but Allah to be worshiped, and that the Prophet Muhammad is his servant and messenger). All the faith and worship of Islam is based on this statement. Islamism is based on the Islamic Commonwealth and there is no fundamental belief, as it is in Islam. Rivalries of Islam are other religions; Islamism one's other political approaches and ideologies. Islamism does not have the ideas, the aims and the sanctions for life after death like in the religion of Islam. It is much more of the minds of Muslim intellectuals and politicians who put forward solutions to the problems of the society they lived in the nineteenth century.

<sup>4</sup> Fazlur Rahman (1882), *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p. 82.

<sup>5</sup> The Economist (2017), "The Future of Islam: Muslim Democrats Inshallah", Aug 26, pp. 18-20. Gus Martin (2016), *Essentials of Terrorism*, California: Sega Publications.

<sup>6</sup> The Economist, "Muslim Democrats Inshallah", p. 18.

*Do Islamists defend an Islamic State?*

Modern Islamism is broadly defined as the pursuit of a state governed by Islamic principles. In the broad spectrum called as Islamist, there are some groups having this idea. However, Islamism grew out of this debate in various directions and emerged in different appearances. Islamist party movements don't have sympathy for the pursuit of a state governed by Islamic principles.<sup>7</sup> They know these kinds of statement to cause disinformative inferences. Islamic state is not in their agenda. In addition, Muslims' last states were not like that either. Ottoman and Mughal states were not an Islamic state. Before the collapse of the Ottomans, the first elections were held in 1876 and multiparty democracy was passed. Mughals in India was able to keep religious and ethnic diversity in peace together. Both had a pluralistic and multi-legal systems. Every nation in the states was subject to its own law. In disagreement, the supreme court of the state was applied. There was also a difference between the canonic law (*şer'i hukuk*) and the customary law in their legal systems.

The concept of the Islamic state is a modern and is borrowed from a nation-state model. In Islamic thought, there has never been an Islamic state which is defined as today's single law, monopoly, sharp borders, national anthem, monolithic state schools. Radical movements want to pattern the autocratic states that radicalize themselves on the Islamic state. The idea of the present Islamic state is not a state that Islam can approve because the Islamic state is not an Islamic state as Hallaq said that: "The Islamic state, which is judged by any standard definition of the modern state, is an impossibility and a contradiction in terms."<sup>8</sup>

*Why should the Islamist party movements be supported?*

Party movements prevent the radicalization by decreasing the tension between the state and society, causing human rights violation. Political leaders such as Necmettin Erbakan, Mahathir Mohammad (Malaysia), Rashid Ghannouchi (Tunisia) and Abdulillah Benkirane (Morocco) reduced antagonism and mass radicalization stopped in their countries. They served as a buffer between the civilians and the autocratic elites. Although it seems to be unsuccessful due to the coup in 2013, Ihvan's political wings in Egypt have served the same function for a long time. This can also apply to (be true of) the left parties in some countries.

Egypt army's pressure is inciting the violence. Ihvan has been trying to be a part of legitimate political processes since the 1970s despite the bureaucracy's criminalization. Nahda in Tunisia has served same function since 1986. It saw that the country was dragged step by step toward a civil war in 2014. To stop this process, the Party was delivered the power to the opposition party. Of course, Ghannouchi's role in these maneuvers was great. A similar experience in Turkey in 1997, Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan also lived. He was pulled out of power when he understood that the political elites would resort to violence.

Most Islamist groups stood upon their rights on times of violence based on democracy and fundamental rights discourses as it was becoming in the headscarf ban in Turkey. In Turkey, party-Islamists struggled to become a part of political life, instead of radicalization, and they went into search for participation in parties. The Democratic Party saw this function largely after 1950. There were also established many independent parties. The first of these was the Islamic Protection Party, which was established in Istanbul on 19 July 1946. This party did not engage in political activity. However, it was banned on 12 September 1946. On 27 August 1951 the Islamic Democratic Party was founded in Istanbul. This party was also banned on October 20, 1952. It became clear that it was difficult to do politics in independent parties. For this reason, conservatives / Islamists have made politics in different parties such as Democratic Party, Millet Party (1948-1954) and Republican Peasant Nation Party (1958-1969).

<sup>7</sup> The Economist, "Muslim Democrats Inshallah", p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> Wael B. Hallaq (2013), *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament*, New York: Columbia University Press, s. 1.

Party movements are fighting for political stability, the development of human rights and democratic values in their countries. Because they focus on political legitimacy, they regard democracy as the only proper political system. They do not have mega ideals like the Islamic state. They are aware of that it is not an Islamic state. As a matter of fact, this desire comes from radical movements.

Political and religious exclusivism do not fit the perspectives of Islamist party movements. They want to integrate with the West. They believe that commercial co-operation will make the Muslim world stronger. As a matter of fact, when this belief disappears, moderate right and left movements begin to gain power. In this respect, party movements represent moderate politics. They are more optimistic and compromising than other groups. It is a clear indication that Turkey, which is experiencing significant problems with the EU due to its hot politics today, insists on maintaining its membership talks and doesn't want to grow apart from Western World.

*Does the radicalization stem from Islam or the violation of rights?*

Radicalizing has many reasons. Violations of rights are the only one of the most important reasons. In the Muslim-majority societies, individual, political and economic freedoms are continually restricted by autocrats. It seems to have a direct proportion between radicalization and violence of rights. Based on this, young support for radical groups increases depends on violence. We can illustrate this with two examples: the first is the radicalization process of Ihvan in Egypt in the 1950s, and the second is the upheavals in Uzbekistan after the decline of the Soviets.

Founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Benna (1906-1949) in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood (Ihvan-i Muslimin) was established as an Islamist movement operating in the field of education and culture, with no political tendencies. Later on, this movement spread to many Arab countries. Members of the organization were started to be arrested on the pretext of an assassination attempt against Cemal Abdul Nasir in 1954. The detainees, including Sayyid Qutub, were subjected to heavy torture.

The same situation occurred in Central Asia after the decline of the Soviet Union in 1989. The Islamic Movement in Uzbekistan under the leadership of Tahir Yoldashev in 1992, Ekremi movement on the initiative of Ekrem Yoldashev in 1996, under the leadership of Mirzazhanov S. Atoyevic, the Hizbu-Nusret movement In 1999 failed to find free activity era and legitimate due to political pressures and restrictions. These groups have been radicalized as the influence of Afghanistan-based mujahideen groups moving to the north through the Fergana Valley when they couldn't resist to the press they were subjected to.<sup>9</sup> Many movements, those that represent legitimate peaceful opposition in the beginning, have been radicalized from the intellectual aspect because of oppression and torture, and some has become violent organizations, of which is now flexible structure and is named as "new terror."

Party movements react more flexibly to repressions and violations. They served as a buffer to prevent further spread of the violations. Their main motivation was to avoid the conflicts to be able to harm society. They thought that political problems should be resolved over time and away from violence.<sup>10</sup> Despite this fact, autocrats and radical secularists are preferred against radical Islam in the Muslim worlds. However, these have actually been factors that strengthened radical religious movements.

In this case, it is right to ask the following question: Why do some religious groups remain radical while some can remain moderate? If moderation or radicalization stems from religion, then we would look for the answer "Which Islam is right?" I do not think we need to discuss it here. Because the groups in legitimate processes and away from violence are both able to control the pressures of the autocrats and to prevent radicalism. Radicalization is largely related to the nature of current political events and the lack of political agents that balance it.

<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey W. Hartman (2016), *The May 2005 Andijan Uprising: What We Know*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program.

<sup>10</sup> John L. Esposito (1999), *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press s. 339.

*How do the secularists and the autocrats look at democracy?*

The secular groups are willing democracy but are afraid of democracy because of their prejudices and feels of insecurities against religious people. The Autocrats do not want democracy in order not to lose the power and opportunities in their hands. They often use the argument that Islam is incompatible with democracy in order to hidden their anti-democratic intentions. They also use secular people's fear and anxiety because they choose the seculars as the social base; they take measures to prevent communication with each other, and support ghettoization so that conflicts last.

In Islam countries there are some mechanisms used by autocrats to prevent democracy:

1. Judgment: If autocrats want, judges can blame politicians and take them from power in silence (think Brazil being taken the last two presidents by judge from power and the third one, Ms. Temer was threatened, and Pakistan for the last president).
2. If they cannot do because the power can sometimes be strong, this time the soldiers step in and the coup is being done.
3. Media and crony capitalist tradesmen support the bureaucracy to block party movements. They have relationship based on mutual interests.

In 1997, judges have sued to the Refah (Welfare) Party in power by ascribing fabricated crimes (like to be focus to anti-democratic doings) with the supports of mainstream media and businessmen led by the bureaucracy in Turkey. The army then issued a statement threatening the government. Prime Minister Erdogan stepped back, leaving power but continued to do politics. The bureaucrats tried to expel the AK Party's power in 2013 by pretending to fight (contend with) the corruption. When it failed, the army wanted to seize control in 15th July 2016, but the coup didn't succeed because of millions of people came out on the streets for resistance. The last coup attempt has done a great damage to democracy. It occupied people's agenda. It pushed the Party to pursue (to seek) the mechanisms to be able to make its power stronger for protecting itself from anti-democratic attacks. However, strategies to make the political parties powerless/weaken by judges and soldiers succeeded in Pakistan and Brazil in 2017. The judges in these countries dismissed the presidents (Nawaz Sharif, Lula da Silva, Dilma Rousseff and continue spots for Michel Temer) on the pretext of Panama Papers without following the procedure of separation of powers. But they continue to do politics; they are not converting their rights-seeking processes into violence.

When we return to the point where the power of the bureaucracy comes from, the bureaucracy takes over all the authorities of parties, civil society, and judiciary by rejecting all responsibilities and wants to rule the country on its own as a final decision maker. The bureaucracy takes its power from its own judiciary, secret police and soldiers. It also uses the mainstream media in its control. This media does not want an alternative one and criminalizes alternative media with the support of the bureaucracy. Another group are businessmen who autocratic bureaucrats work together. Among these groups, there is a circular secret relation. This is like either in Egypt where bureaucrats directly control commercial capital with their allies, or in Turkey where they work in companies with high salaries after their retirement for ensuring cooperation between bureaucrats and others.

The secularists' prejudices that based on their anxiety and autocrats' crony capitalistic interests keep them out of democracy. Secularists have been giving partial support to autocrats. They want to make sure that their individual and political rights are guaranteed, so they are demanding a limited (tutelary) democracy that will keep the Islamists away from the bureaucracy. They think that Islamist parties should only do municipal activities but not make policy and bureaucratic assignment.



The way to make the bureaucracy democratic is not street rallies or insurgencies, but transition to open society in a gradual and balanced process. The main actors of this process are the Islamist party movements which have commonsense and which are aware of the attitudes and expectations of the secularists and bureaucrats and their internal and external supporters in their countries, and Islamists can strategize accordingly.

*How do Islamist party movements look at democracy?*

In short, it will suffice to answer with a few quotes. Ghannouchi argued that “it would not be in the interest of Muslims to imagine an incompatibility between democracy and Islam.” He said more recently that “Muslims should make jihad for democracy and human rights”. Hassan Turabi in Sudan affirmed that an Islamic order of government is essentially a form of representative democracy. Maybe you cannot confirm these kinds of discourses, but I offer we should give them the opportunity. Similarly, Anwar Ibrahim stated in Malaysia, “It is a moral imperative for Muslims to be fully committed to democratic ideals.”<sup>11</sup> Erdogan has always said that he was not against democracy and secularism, but hostility against the religion.

*Are the Islamists’ democratic experiences unsuccessful, as claimed?*

Many articles lately published in the Western journals and newspapers have alleged that Islamists’ democratic experiences in the Muslim geography have failed. In these writings, it has been implied that Islamists are not ready for democracy, and for this reason autocratic governments are more preferable than Islamists that cannot be trusted to them because of having their hidden agendas. This is exemplified by Egypt and Turkey.<sup>12</sup>

The political bans, the military and bureaucratic coups, extrajudicial executions, torture and arrests have been implemented on the party movements in Egypt and Turkey since 1950s. Party movements did not have equivalent rights and actions. Then why are they failing? They are not unsuccessful in democracy. On contrary, they fail because they cannot prevent the anti-democratic bureaucracy. If the party movements had taken more support in Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan and Turkey as from 1990s, there would have been more moderate political movements today in the countries of hard autocrats like Saddam, Assad and Gaddafi. The same applies to the Turkic Republics in Central Asia.

Hamas in Palestine is an obvious example of how democracy makes radical organizations moderate. Hamas has embraced democracy today and is distant from violence. The organization left terrorist attacks after 2006. Of course, Hamas accepted the presence of Israel Government at the beginning of 2017, although there’s a whole heap more work to be done in the way of democracy for Hamas. In October 2017, he signed a “compromise agreement” with al-Fatih. Islamist party movements have proved with their every action that participation get them more democratize and that they are the most potential democratic actors in their own countries.<sup>13</sup> Despite these facts, the achievements of party movements have been used as an excuse to limit the development of political liberalization or to close the gates of democratization in the Muslim-majority countries by bureaucrats in their countries. I wonder if we should wait for Samuel Huntington’s next forth wave.

We can give an example from Guinea being 85 per cent Muslim. The first democratic election was held in 2010. Alpha Condé who has been the first elected president of Guinea proposed a “reunification” by presenting the ministry to opposition politics to stop violence tendencies starting before 2010 election. All the examples prove that Islamist parties manage the processes well everywhere, even if we need more time.

<sup>11</sup> John L. Esposito, Tamara Sonn ve John O. Voll (2016), *Islam and Democracy after the Arab Spring*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, s. 15

<sup>12</sup> The Economist, “Muslim Democrats Inshallah”, s. 19.

<sup>13</sup> JEsposito, *The Islamic Threat*, s. 315.

*Are the Islamists radicalizing/totalitarianizing after coming to power?*

It is often claimed that Islamists dream of creating an Islamic state in their countries, replete with sharia, by using democracy as a mean. The Economist wrote that: "When elected, ostensibly moderate and democratic Islamists have too often proved to be neither, lending credence to the argument that their commitment to democracy goes little further than "one man, one vote, one time."<sup>14</sup> According to many, the seemingly moderate and democratic Islamists have proven that they are not when they are elected. These claims are the result of implicit biases against the Islamist party movements, because there is no story confirming these claims. The Economist gave as evidence to prove its claim that Morsi has placed his own men (Islamists) in the bureaucracy after he came to power in Egypt after elected in 2012. That is not evidence, but enigma. Because the development of democracy not only in the Muslim-majority world, but in everywhere depends on the bureaucracy becoming open to the whole social groups. The diversity in the bureaucracy is the assurance, warrant and demonstration for democracy, but not a threat. Contrary to what was claimed, this was not a totalitarianism or an Islamist mistake.

It is necessary to use to concrete methods to measure democracy stage in a society. Two types of qualities need to be examined to evaluate the development of democracy. The first is constituent (موقم) conditions for democracy. The constituent conditions of democracy are multi-party politics, regular elections and right to participation (political freedoms). The second is not constituent, but necessary conditions (يروض) for democracy: These are the having/being a constitution based on rule of law; the being developed civil society, private property, individual rights and free trade; the having right to equal access to civil servants and public positions<sup>15</sup> (could be called equal citizenship); and being principle of separation of powers. The first one is a special feature of the democracy, while the second one is a genus (or family) feature. Genus features can also be shared by other political systems being non-democratic. There is actually a third condition, which we can be called it as the situation conditions. This means that in a society it is necessary to find suitable conditions for the development of democracy. Suitable conditions are like these: 1. The culture of society is suitable for democracy. 2. Religion is suitable for this. 3. Society is not at war. 4. There is no severe tension between the social groups. 5. A strong government can be established. 6. The government has no secret partners. 7. Individuals trust public authority etc.<sup>16</sup>

When these criteria are taken into account, that the Islamist party movements come to power lead to the development of democracy and make totalitarianism weak. Their successful political experiences also contribute them to adopt democratic and liberal values more. Power liberalizes party movements.

*Are the Islamist party movements enemy to the West?*

In the Muslim-majority societies, extremist religious groups and leftist secular movements, both are mostly accused of the West to be colonial. They are against everything that comes from the West. Islamists are not enemies to the West, but they are angry to the West. The most important reason of this anger is that the Western governments supported the autocrats and turned a blind eye to coups (1991 Algeria, 1997 Turkey, 2013 Egypt, 2016 Turkey, 2017 Pakistan). At the same time, they admire the political values, science, technique and work discipline in the West. For this reason, the attitude of the Muslim world to the West can be expressed in a tension between admiration and resentment.

<sup>14</sup> The Economist, "Muslim Democrats Inshallah", s. 20.

<sup>15</sup> John Rawls (1999), *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, s. 53. Rawls' in Second Justice Principle: Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all.

<sup>16</sup> See for an assessment based on academic criteria, Ioannis N. Grigoriadis (2017), *Democratic Transition and the Rise of Populist Majoritarianism: Constitutional Reform in Greece and Turkey*, Palgrave Macmillan.

*Does Islamists' political motivation based on religion?*

It can partly be said “yes”, but it cannot be said that party-Islamists have completely taken their motivations from religion. They reject the political understanding that causes the conflict between religiosity and laicity. They do not find it meaningful and democratic. Islamist party movements defend an inclusive political secularism (laicism) based on freedom of religion and conscience. They are opposed to the exclusive laicism being defended by autocrats to violate political rights. Exclusive laicism practices are used to keep party-Islamists away from bureaucracy and legally to be justified to reduce the public and political visibility/appearance of religiosity in the public and governmental positions. This type of laicism conflicts with the freedom of religion and conscience. Islamists don't accept this. Erdogan has always said that he has accepted “real laicism” to be compatible with freedom of religion and conscience.

Islam's view of political issues is secular, and this is expressed in the traditional method of Islamic law with these terms: *maslaha* (مصلحة), *masalehe mursala* (مصلحة مرسلة) and *sadde zaraye* (سد الذرائع). These are political secularistic terms in Islam tradition. At the same time, it was used the concepts (عمل جماعي), (عمل قفتم), (عمل جماعي), (عمل جماعي). The Quran says: “They work in consultation with each other.”<sup>17</sup> Islamic politics did not exclude non-Muslims in its history. It did not create the political discrimination against non-Muslims. Therefore, exclusive political secularism (ideological laicism) coincides with the historical experience of Muslims. In Islamic history, political issues were negotiated. Muslims' experience of democracy is new but there are no religious or historical obstacles in front of it to develop. The first democratic elections in the Muslim world were held in 1876 in the Ottoman state. Then, there was no any objection to election among the Ottoman intellectuals. Finally, the motivations of Islamist party movements do not conflict with democratic and liberal values, but rather provide support.

*Are the Islamist party movements using democracy to seize power as a means?*

Party movements have built their strategies on avoidance from social conflict and violence. For this reason, it is not possible to consider that they abandon or limit/restrict the democracy. This would lead both them to lose their power and country to slide into conflicts that would have heavy consequences. For this reason, it is unthinkable for party movements to give up the democracy. Party movements are also the strongest movements having democratic experience. Even we can say that the party movements are memories of the experience of democracy in the Muslim-majority societies.

The statement “the Quran is our constitution” used often by some Islamist group is shown as an evidence for Islamists instrumentalizing / making a means the democracy.<sup>18</sup> This is a slogan to be produced in modern times and erroneous. The Quran is not a constitution. All the Islamic groups do not advocate this. This reflects the unfortunate influence of nation-state thought on Islamic movements. If there was an Islamic constitution, then it would be the Medina contract. It was prepared under Prophet Mohammad guidance. It is the first broadly civil constitution in human history. If we are talking about Islamic constitution, this should be the Medina contract. It has ensured that everyone has commercial rights; brought principle of individual criminal responsibility; given equal social rights for women. It was based on the protection of goods; political and commercial rights of non-Muslims. In the Medina contract all social groups are reconciled, also including Jews and Christians. Another example for a constitution prepared by Muslim was *Kanun-u Esasi* (the Ottoman basic law) in 1876. If Quran was a constitution, then why was written these constitutions?

The Economist says so: “Democracy was not one of Mohammad's prescriptions, so Hasan al-Banna rejected it as a foreign import, along with political parties and even the modern Arab state. But he also saw progress towards the Islamic state happening in stages, each requiring different tactics.”<sup>19</sup> The reason for the non-development of democracy in the modern Arab states is that Prophet Mohammad didn't recommended it or

<sup>17</sup> (نور فسنی مدان قزر آمه مونیب یروش مرم او ءالصلا اوم اقاو مقبرل - Shura - 38.)

<sup>18</sup> The Economist, “Muslim Democrats Inshallah”, s. 20.

<sup>19</sup> The Economist, “Muslim Democrats Inshallah”, s. 20.

Banna rejected it. The reason is that autocrats think that the civilian and open society will damage the wealth of their families. In addition, Prophet Mohammed had not another prescription about politics, and not a bit autocracy or oligarchy.

Another claim is related to the caliphate. It is claimed that Islamic party movements want to bring caliphate. Hereditary caliphate in which religious and secular power were united in one figure was the model for Islamic politics for more than a millennium, until 1922. Party movements have no such purpose; the caliphate in today's world can only be a symbolic institution. In addition, the caliphate is not a religious institution, but a product of Muslims' daily political experience. Caliph is not an innocent, infallible, unquestionable religious personality either. This is another debate and there are no such agendas of Islamic party movements.

#### *Do party movements support terrorism and violence?*

Some allege that the nature of political Islam is militant. This claim is often put forward as an excuse to prevent democratization. This is not based on concrete events, but on fears and rumors. The lack of concrete signs has turned into conspiracy theories, as if they have "secret agendas" and are "wolves under the sheepskin." Yet no concrete data has emerged to date about whether Islamists have secret organizations or secret purposes. The elected governments are trying to avoid oligarchic oppression on politics and to establish equitable relationships in either politics and diplomacy (international relationship). These efforts are often interpreted as violence, not diplomacy.

Party movements are shown as close to the violent and the terrorist groups in many western media and academia. "Islamism" term is used as an umbrella term that brings the party movements together with terrorist organizations. However, these are far apart from each other and have no actual and intellectual links between them.

Ash-Shabab, Boko-Haram, IS, al-Qaeda are the most brutal terrorist organizations in the world today. Their terrorist motivations don't feed on Islamic beliefs. Islam has 1400-year history and such terrorist movements have emerged after the Afghanistan war and subsequent wars. They want to motivate their militants with Islam faith by making over-interpretations and literal readings to holy writings. They were emerged by wars, human rights violations, not religion. Resisting violence with violence brings more destruction for communities. The absence of legitimate strong democratic governments in the Muslim-majority societies fosters these groups of violence. The governments must be both legitimate and strong. Power and legitimacy are linked to each other. Legitimacy comes from democracy and democratic governments take their power from their legitimacy. For this reason, the way to stop violence is to improve the democracy. This may only be possible with the support of party movements, not by making them to criminalize.

We can understand it better by looking at the claims about Ikhwan. The Economist writes by leaving in suspend its intention: "That the Brotherhood has inspired violence and that its members have carried out attacks is not in doubt; whether it is essentially violent is harder to say."<sup>20</sup> First lie, then lighten it. There is no act of violence belonging to the main body of Ikhwan. Ikhwan excludes the tendencies of violence, and those who are excluded go to the Jamaat Islamiyya. They are excluded by Ikhwan after the coup, and they are trying to gain strength in Sinai Desert. They will probably turn out to be a major disaster for Egypt and the Muslim world in the future. The reason for this is the prevention of Ikhwan's political activities. Radical movements can never obtain mass community support; on contrary, they obtain militants who sacrifice themselves for "lofty goal". They enhance their ability to act with these militants.

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<sup>20</sup> The Economist, "Muslim Democrats Inshallah", s. 18. Kardeşliğin şiddete ilham kaynağı olduğu ve üyelerinin saldırı düzenlediği şüphe götürmez; esasen şiddet içinde olup olmadıklarını söylemek daha zor.

Ihwan's political wing is an obstacle in front of the radicalization. Ihwan is a civilian state formed by those who excluded from commercial and political areas. It has hospitals, schools and foodbanks. Its members hold in their hands the market system outside the autocrats and their bureaucrats, who hold a large part of the economic life. It is not possible to confirm this because of the resulting antagonism, but it is a consequence of being excluded. This situation does not solve the problems in Egypt, but it keeps Ihwan and its followers away from violence.

*Will Islamist party movements prefer Islamic law or secular law?*

The law is not a static area. It is dynamic and shaped by circumstances. Islamic law, or law in general, can not have a static content. As a matter of fact, it has been developed modes in Islamic law to make it dynamic such as *ijtihad*, *ijma* and *maslahat*. Islamic law is also not static about punishment. Crimes are called "hudud", and they do not determine punishment, but rather the upper limits of punishment. For this reason Islam does not exclude a secular legal system. Moreover, in the historical experience of Muslims, it has always been a multi-legal system, just as today the EU countries has.

*How does the Western majority see the Muslim communities politically?*

The book *The Islamic Threat: Myth and Reality*, written in 1991 by John L. Esposito, discusses the relationship between the West and the Muslim world, and examines Western's perception about the East, which he thinks this perception is determined their relationships. Esposito didn't say different things from what is written here about the supporters of the autocrats. There seems not to be something new in the past 25 years. But I think there are two wests: Optimists and pessimists. Just as in the Muslim world, although the rate of evils / extremists is low, the attitudes of the pessimists are more decisive in the West as well.

In the Western world we see pessimists dominated by three institutions: media, academia and politicians. They feature some Islamic terms and they ascribe them pejorative meanings. The concepts are *khalifeta*, *sharia*, *Islamism*, *jihad*, *Islamic law*. These terms are meant to be contrary to democracy and liberal values; and an Islam (world) perception is created through these terms. Then it is explained why autocrats are worth supporting on the ground of misunderstandings.

Pessimists mostly suspect the Islamist parties. They find these movements with more suspicion than autocrats and dictators. The Economist is referring to the Islamist parties, even to Ghannouchi as follows: "Islamists might play down their divine objective early on, and even participate in elections, if it improved their position in the long term."<sup>21</sup> The sentence includes a lot of ambiguities and doubts.

The same article writes that Morsi flooded the government with Islamists after his coming into power in order to justify the 2013 coup in Egypt, and that for this reason, the majority of the people given support the coupers during the coup by saying "By the time of the coup against him much of the public was on the army's side."<sup>22</sup> If the people were on the army's side, the coupers immediately would lay the ballot boxes again and would provide/obtain their democratic legitimacy. The Economist makes this logical mistake by writing these kinds of news because it is based on emotional evidence or enigma (i.e., with fear and worry, with perceptions not with events), not rational ones about the Islamist party movements. In addition, there is no any mention about the thousands of the people who the coupers killed in the *rabiatu'l-adaviyye* square where they were protesting the coup without violence.

It seems that pessimists are badly influencing the mainstream media, academia and politicians in the West. Most of their views and conceptualizations of the Muslim geography are not correct. The intellectuals in the

<sup>21</sup> The Economist, "Muslim Democrats Inshallah", s. 19. İslamcılar, eğer uzun dönemde işlerine yarayacaksa kutsal amaçlarını önce önemsiz gibi gösterebilirler, hatta seçimlere katılabilirler.

<sup>22</sup> The Economist, "Muslim Democrats Inshallah", s. 20.

West should not be defeated to the disinformation, they should diversify their sources of knowledge and they need to deconstruct their current perceptions.

*Is Islam compatible with democracy?*

Many studies start with the question “Is Islam compatible with democracy?” This problem, which assumes stable Islam’s daily procedures (muamalah, treatment), is insignificant and meaningless. Unfortunately, however, this reality is losing the meaning, and this question is turning it into something that needs to be dealt with because the debate often focuses on it.

In The New York Times in 1991, Leslie Gelb wrote:

“It is more important for democratizing societies to have a free press than free elections. Today in most Islamic countries, free elections would produce fundamentalist victories (author: Party movement never became fundamentalistic) and validate the imposition of theocracy. Similar concerns should attend the new interest of Islamic fundamentalists in democracy. They have pressed for free elections in several Arab countries. Presenting themselves as protectors of the oppressed, they have done quite well in these elections, as they knew they would. But it is questionable that their real aim is to promote democracy. The danger is that they often reduce democracy to “free elections”, and free elections can be a trap. They can legitimize would-be dictators as well as democrats. Islam draws no line between religion and politics... Elections would become trivial in that environment.”<sup>23</sup>

The ones which written in 1991 are no any different than those which written in today’s The Economist; 25 is a long time and no any sign to date Islamists to be dictator, but the mainstream media in the West has been continuing same allegations. 1991’ The New York Times and 2017’s The Economist are based on emotional predictions instead of evidence.

What is the main point? Those who allege that Islam is incompatible with democracy are based upon two sources: The first is the historical experience of Muslims; and the second is the main sources of Islam, the Quran and the Sunnah. We cannot object to saying that Islam is compatible with democracy in terms of both historical experience and holy texts, because they achieve/obtain a dynamic result, even if there are some errors in the methods they use. In other words, by adhering to the main rule of social science (practical knowledge, humanities), it is argued that Islamic culture and its main texts have sufficient potentials and dynamism to answer the problems of the people of today’s world.

The number of people who discriminate between Islam and democracy is quite high. According to them, Islam is a self-sufficient system, based on divine dominion and a sacred law; so it is not possible to reconcile it with concepts such as secularism and civic sovereignty and with civil law. Some have argued that they can foster/develop their own democracy from Islam and that there is no need for the Western democracies.

Islam and democracy, both are not static structures/systems either. Societies, of course, can add their positive historical experiences to democracy applications. It is meaningless to base these kinds of exceptionalities on religion. The exceptional essences in Islam such as the Tawhid belief and basic worships are not something to be able to badly affect the understanding of democracy.

Those who claim that Islam is incompatible with democracy assume that Muslims’ historical experience is static and Muslim societies are incapable of producing new values.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, they think that main texts are static, and that texts literally specify/determine societies. In other words, this view assumes that all Islamic societies are top ten fundamentalists, like some of the Tennessee Evangelists. This is a faulty generalization.

<sup>23</sup> Leslie Gelb (1991) *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/05/29/opinion/foreign-affairs-the-free-elections-trap.html>

<sup>24</sup> In 1993, seminal political scientist Samuel Huntington wrote, “Islamic concepts of politics differ from and contradict the premises of democratic politics.” See, *The Third Wave*, p. 267. John L. Esposito criticizes that in *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?*, p.8.

Theological views are not premises of political attitudes, whereas political situations often lead to the inclusive or exclusive theological views according to conditions in. Of course this is not a logical necessity.

Al-Farabi regarded the purpose of politics as creating a peaceful society (al-madinatu'l-fadila). According to him, societies do this with an ideology (mille ملة) they set up, and the ideology of each society is different. There is not a single good mille/ideology, and every society can establish its own millea/ideologies. There are virtuous nations/millea and ignorant millea/nations. Successful communities have the first one. Today's political scientists do not offer anything else than al-Farabi's sayings. There are times when Muslims have formed peace societies if goal of politics is peace. If Islam is compatible with good governance and democracy is good governance then Islam is compatible with democracy.

This is a simple and valid reasoning for the method of practical sciences (humanities). This inference also suits the methods of all of the fiqh schools in Islamic belief: to Imam Shafii's analogy; Ahmet bin Hanbel's practice of the salaf (the antecessors); Imam Malik's judge by literality of holy texts; Abu Hanifa and Jafari Sadik's consensus (icma') are suitable for this inference. So, it is not meaningful to claim that democracy is incompatible with the main texts of Islam. It is the induction mistake to reach a general judgment by looking at some particular understanding on this matter. It is wrong to make a decision by looking at both certain parts of the theology of Islam and particular understandings without understanding the methods of Islamic sciences.

Societies are not static. Like other societies, Muslim societies live in possible worlds. The closest not-p case is probable in the possible worlds. To say that Islam does not coincide with democracy, then, contains a fundamental logical error. The Christian world has formed its own political experience by struggling with the Church, and today it has succeeded in establishing a political order that has strongly made the state neutrality and religious freedom. This success is the result of a historical struggle. Good political systems can only be achieved through experience. Islamist party movements are the most important and careful carriers of this experience in the Muslim-majority societies.

## Conclusion

Democracy in the Muslim-majority societies have some problems. However, the development of new political attitudes may be possible with wide-ranging political liberalization and participation. This is only possible in a process to be able to being obtained with time and experience. Those who adopt this process are all party movements and specially Islamist party movements in the Muslim-majority societies. If the prejudices against them continue and autocrats' tutelage systems are supported instead of being supported the party movements, the development of democracy in the Muslim societies would stay just a dream, and would continue nightmares on the Muslim societies.

Illegitimate powers are in need of radical movements. That is why, they criminalize society. This makes the radicalization stronger and visibler. Democracy starts to lose its value in these societies. The inability to develop civil society and democracy leads to more hardaning/consolidation of authoritarian regimes and cultures. Although authoritarian regimes seem to be appropriate for short-term interests, in reality they cause radicalism and instability in the long run.<sup>25</sup> This is why, in Muslim-majority countries, democracy should be given time to take root and be strengthened through practice. Muslim-majority countries need to take root and be strengthened through practice for democracy.

All the party movements in the Muslim-majority societies are the most important political actors for the development of democracy. Islamist party movements also are the most significant part of that. We need to support them instead of criminalizing them on a par with other party movements.

<sup>25</sup> Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, s. 341.



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