

Moderate Islam and Secularist Opposition in Turkey: Implications for the World, Muslims and Secular Democracy

MURAT SOMER ¹

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ABSTRACT

Developing an argument based in theories of democratic consolidation and religious competition, and discussing the reasons for the secularist opposition to the government, this article analyzes how government by a party rooted in moderate-Islamism may affect Turkey's peculiar secular democracy, development, and external relations and how Muslims in the world relate to modernization/democracy. Arguing that secularism in advanced democracies may be a product of democracy as much as it is the other way around, the article maintains that democratic consolidation may secure further consolidation of Turkish secularism and sustainable moderation of Turkish political Islam. Besides democratic Islamic-conservative actors and other factors, democratic consolidation requires strong democratic-secularist political parties so that secularist and moderate-Islamist civilian actors check and balance each other. Otherwise, middle class value divisions and mistrust in areas like education and social regulation may jeopardize democratization and economic modernization, and, continuing reconciliation of Islamism with secular democracy and modernity.

The main goal of this article is to examine what the current divisions in Turkey over political Islam may imply for the way we envision the relationships between religion, Islam, and modernization, especially the relationship between democratic consolidation and secularism.

Following its landslide electoral victory in July 2007, Turkey's governing AKP (Justice and Development Party), a party rooted in Islamism, has been solidified as a leading political actor and given a historical opportunity to reshape Turkey's social and political mainstream. How will this affect Turkey's modernization, secular democracy, and external relations, and what does all this mean for the world in regard to Muslims' relations with modernity and secular democracy? At first, the answers to these questions seem to depend on the nature of the AKP itself: whether it is a secretly Islamist, moderate Islamist, or Islamic-conservative democratic party, and how sincere its commitments are to secular democracy. Alternatively, one may ask to what extent Islamic principles, or, for that matter, religious principles, can be compatible with secular democracy in the long run, a critical question throughout the world.

A more complete analysis reveals that there are no fixed answers. The AKP as a party and ideology, and moderate Islamism in general, are dynamic. Religious politics is a product of both its own roots and its domestic and international political and economic milieu. One can foresee different AKPs, and thus different prospects for Turkish secularism, depending on various factors, most importantly the consolidation of democracy. Thus the party's legacy will depend as much on the party's own decisions as it will on the decisions of the secularist

¹ Murat Somer is Associate Professor of International Relations, Koç University, Rumelifeneri Yolu, Sarıyer 34450 Istanbul. E-mail: musomer@ku.edu.tr.

political actors, the Turkish political system, economic development and external support, and social divisions over values.

The establishment and, so far, performance of the AKP forms a major example of the “moderation” of political Islam by embracing democracy, modernity, and liberal global economy, as opposed to ‘radical’ Islamism which pursues an Islamic state as in Iran or Saudi Arabia.¹ The party defines itself as conservative democratic, and its record in government since 2002 ‘has been markedly moderate’.² It has achieved path-breaking reforms in democratization, and continuous economic stability and growth. It secured the start of Turkey’s EU accession talks in 2005. It became the first governing party since 1960 to have the courage to stand up to the military’s interference in politics by publicly denouncing the military’s criticism of the government.³

The party’s moderation cannot be explained away as an unintended and unreliable product of opportunistic steps in response to ‘lucky coincidences’.⁴ The party was able to use its opportunities because a young and pragmatic generation of Turkish Islamists critical of the old guard decided to found the AKP with a deliberately chosen pro-democracy program and secular outlook. They did so by learning from past mistakes and with an eye to appealing to broader segments of the electorate.⁵

Yet, significant portions of Turkish society and the secularist military and judiciary continue to see the AKP as suspect of anti-secular, and, for that matter, anti-democratic tendencies. Secularist rallies in the spring of 2007 drew millions of people. The rallies are indicative of a major social-political rift in this pivotal emerging market and democracy. How this rift is managed will determine whether Turkish democracy will finally become a full rather than guided democracy, where democracy includes not only free elections but also the freedom of elected governments to pursue policies disapproved of by the military on issues such as secularism and the Kurdish question. It will also determine the evolution of Turkish secularism and political Islam.

Which AKP and Which Moderation?

The AKP represents Turkey’s new modernizers with Islamist and Islamic-conservative roots, who both benefited from secular modernization and deeply resented its perceived anti-religious practices.⁶ One way to predict its future evolution and impact on Turkish democracy could be via a crude application of what may be called the ‘democratic moderation thesis’.⁷ According to this thesis, the more the AKP participates in democracy, the more it would ‘moderate’ and contribute to democratization and modernization. The more it is excluded, the less it would moderate, jeopardizing further democratization and modernization, and relations with the western world.

As I will elaborate in the sections ahead, we need a more multifaceted understanding of Turkish politics and of moderate Islamism to make a more accurate prediction. The moderation of Turkish Islam in the example of the AKP did not result from simple, unrestrained participation in democracy, but from a complex mixture of incentives to participate and disincentives to accentuate Islam, in a guided democracy.

In fact, roughly speaking, three different scenarios can produce three different AKPs and thus three different moderate Islamisms. A major determinant of these scenarios will be the AKP’s secularist rivals.

The first scenario can occur if the AKP is rivaled by weak and fragmented secularist political parties. In this case the party would be emboldened to launch further legal-institutional reforms which may initially strengthen democracy, for example by reducing the military's clout. One may also argue that the weakness of the parties in the center-right and center-left encourages the party to adopt more moderate policies to fill the gap. Simultaneously, however, if unrivalled, the party may find it irresistible to promote a deeper and faster Islamization, not necessarily of government, but of society in education and social regulation. Moralists within the party may gain clout at the expense of pragmatists. Such social Islamization would eventually be self-destructive for the AKP. It would jeopardize modernization via an eventual deterioration of the relations with the western world, especially with the EU which could not embrace an increasingly Islamic Turkey in the face of rising Islamophobia in Europe. This scenario would also jeopardize democracy as a result of the interventions of the military which cannot accept the rapid erosion of secular modernism envisioned by Atatürk. Democratization would also be undermined if it is the fear of military interventions that dissuade the party from accentuating Islamization.

The second scenario can occur if the AKP is balanced by strong secularist political parties, but those which hold secular-nationalism above democratization. In this case, the AKP may capitalize on religious nationalism in order to rival secular nationalism. Nationalism is likely to remain a major force in Turkey, not necessarily as a political ideology but as a value, for three main reasons. First, the Kurdish question and the re-escalation of the Kurdish-separatist violence are fomenting Turkish nationalism, while rising Turkish nationalism itself, the rise of Kurdish nationalism in the Middle East, and the possibility of a Kurdish state in neighboring Iraq are fomenting Kurdish nationalism. Second, the Turkish military is encouraging Turkish nationalism as an antidote to both Kurdish separatism and Islamism. Third, Turkish nationalism is fueled by the negative attitudes in some European countries toward Turkey's EU membership prospects, which are widely publicized in Turkey. In this environment, the AKP may find it necessary to compete with secular-nationalist rivals by promoting Turkish nationalism with Islamic-conservative (Sunni Muslim) overtones.

In this case, Turkey and the world would face a hard choice between two authoritarian forces: one secular-nationalist and the other Islamic-conservative nationalist. Neither force could deepen democratic modernization because competitive nationalist agendas would produce inward-looking economic policies and would exacerbate the Kurdish conflict by deepening the resentments of Turkish Kurds. Sunni-Muslim nationalism would also alienate the Alevi Muslim population. Because of their weak democratic credentials, both forces would also face problems in deepening relations with the EU and the USA. Relations with the USA may also be undermined more directly because Turkey may venture to invade Northern Iraq despite USA disapproval. All in all, Turkey would remain a flawed democracy and failed economic miracle at best, and a case of democratic reversal and a semi-developed economy at worst.

The third and most promising scenario can occur if the AKP is checked and balanced by strong secularist political parties that manage to translate secularist and nationalist concerns into political programs combining modernization with further democratization. Thus, by strong secularist parties here, I am referring to voter support as well as ability to minimize corruption within party ranks, produce well thought-out social and economic programs, and build long-term links with constituencies. In this case, pragmatists within the AKP would remain in control in order to appeal to mainstream voters. Both Turks and the world would have a healthy choice between two projects of democratic modernization in Turkey, one Islamic-conservative but largely secular, and one secularist. Secularist voters would no longer

look to the military as a guarantor of secularism because the AKP's project of moderate Islamization would be checked by democratic secularist forces. Islamic-conservatives would not need to capitalize on religious nationalism or Islamic radicalism because they would have a fair chance of coming to power through democratic processes and implementing some of their agenda. This scenario would also have a good chance of sustaining rapid economic development and deepening relations with the EU and the USA.

To accurately gauge the likelihood of each scenario and the consequences for 'secularism', we need a closer look at the secularist grievances and the theoretical links between secularism and democracy.

The Nature of the Secularist Mobilization: Implications for Turkey and the World

Many of the speakers and organizers of the secularist rallies appeared to advocate extreme nationalist or secularist views which find weak support by the Turkish electorate. Given the moderate record of the AKP, what motivated the ordinary participants of the rallies? This mass mobilization of secularism is a new phenomenon in a country with a predominantly Muslim culture. In many ways, it was hard to describe them, understand their motivations, and assess their implications.⁸

The rallies were triggered by the AKP's nomination of the Foreign Affairs Minister Gül for President. It was threatening to the protesters that politicians with an Islamist background could control both Parliament and the Presidency. The possibility of Prime Minister Erdoğan's candidacy itself had earlier been strongly opposed by secularists. Gül also faced opposition because his wife wore an Islamic-type headscarf, which its critics call 'turban'.⁹ In the secularists' perception, the turban symbolizes one's opposition to Atatürk's secular reforms. Thus, for them, the country's first lady wearing it would symbolize a major shift of power in society.

The rallies, however, indicated a more complex rift which was hard for outside observers to describe. Was the rift about piety versus non-piety? Secular enlightenment versus religious revivalism? Class conflict? The mass participation in the rallies contradicted the framework of 'secular elites versus Islamic masses', with which outside observers are accustomed to analyzing conflicts over secularism in Muslim societies. Some journalists wrote about '*secularized* [emphasis mine] Turks aspiring to a Western lifestyle'.¹⁰ Some described a 'chasm between the secular and the pious', implying that piety, a matter of faith, and secularism, an ideology or set of values regarding the separation of faith and worldly affairs, exclude each other.¹¹ Others referred to 'urban, secular Turks' versus 'the broad base of devout Turks from the country's heartland'.¹²

Secularism and Moderate Islam as Middle Class Phenomena

The new religious-conservative elite are challenging the status of the secularist state elite. The new elite ascended to power by challenging old-style Islamists of the Erbakan tradition and culturally Muslim-conservative yet secularist politicians of the Demirel tradition.

Economically, competition is occurring between secularist big business elite and the recently emerged Islamic-conservative business elite.¹³ After all, the AKP came to power when both the political center and part of the economic center collapsed in 2001 following financial crises. Most Turks correctly blamed the corruption of political and economic elites for the crises.

However, more than an elite struggle, the current battle is occurring in the social-cultural realm between two middle classes: the secularist middle class and the new religious-conservative middle class. The former is skeptical of all Islamism of all sorts and the latter is drawn to a moderate and pro-modern sort of Islamism.

Interestingly, moderate Islam may produce different implications for the secularist Turkish middle class and the world. Followers of Turkish politics and the AKP in the world include Islamists seeking recognition in order to participate in democratic politics, Arab democrats and autocrats concerned that transition to democracy may bring Islamists to power, the EU trying to gauge who the true democrats are in Turkey, and people throughout the world concerned with Islamic extremism and the lack of democracy in Muslim countries. For many of these actors, a moderate party like the AKP can create a positive example by showing the world how Islam can coexist with secular, multiparty democracy. In their eyes, a moderate Islam that is peaceful and respectful of individualism, secular laws, a market-oriented economic system, and democratic competition is surely preferable to 'radical Islam' which is keen to control the state and the economy, to instate religious law, and to employ violence.

Turkish Secularism and Secularist Mobilization

For secularist protesters in Turkey, however, moderate Islam seems to be more dangerous than radical Islam. The protesters include staunch secularists skeptical of religion altogether. But they also include Muslims, pious and non-pious, who are comfortable with the basic principles, if not all the practice of, Turkish secularism.

Anti-religious ideas might have influenced some of the Kemalist reforms which laid down the basic principles of Turkey's secular, or 'laicist' system. However, the system that emerged does not oppose religion. Nor does it envision an absolute separation of religion and state as in the USA.¹⁴ Its laws and political institutions are based in strictly secular principles. But it also exemplifies high state regulation of Islam in the name of promoting national unity, secularizing social and political life, making room for modernization/westernization, and, arguably, curbing Sunni Islam's competitive tendencies which will be discussed shortly.

Some state involvement in religious affairs, and vice versa, is common in democracies. Many European democracies such as Denmark have state churches, and others such as Germany restrict proselytizing.¹⁵ However, Turkey distinguishes itself by the degree of public involvement in, and control of, religion, even more than in France. The Turkish constitution tasks the state with providing religious services via the Directorate of Religious Affairs and with providing moral education. State involvement in religious services and education has increased over time with the policies of center-right governments and of the military regime in 1980-83. The latter promoted Islam as an antidote to communism and the politicization of the youth, echoing the Brzezinski doctrine of establishing a 'green crescent' surrounding the Soviet Union's southern belly.

Through religious services and education, the Turkish state attempts to influence social norms and culture by offering a version of Islam that is apolitical, rationalist, and does not seek to regulate all spheres of life. In effect, the state itself promotes a type of moderate Islam, in the production of which it tries to maintain a partial monopoly position. For those who are comfortable with this type of religion, the main threat would come from another moderate Islam, not radical Islam. Thus, Islamic communities promoting their own versions of pro-modern Islam, a major constituency for the AKP, competes with the state-sponsored religion while also cooperating with it where necessary for survival and self-advancement.

Secularists understand that radical Islamism has little potential to rule in Turkey. Atatürk's reforms deeply transformed society, secularism and multiparty democracy have relatively long legacies, and the military and western alliances oppose radical Islamism. Thus, although the majority of Turks consider themselves religious, they are 'non-conservative' in the sense that they are willing to reconcile their faith with the opportunities that modernity and largely secular, i.e. worldly, life styles offer.¹⁶ It is unlikely that they would support a revolutionary Islamism.

However, the majority of the Turkish public may conceivably support a moderate Islamism. This may lead to the gradual Islamization of social life because Islam forms a major aspect of the Turkish culture, and, because of Sunni Islam's competitive structure. Sunni Islam, the dominant form of Islam in Turkey as well as the world, does not have a central doctrinal authority. Despite historical and modern attempts to institutionalize 'traditional' Islamic jurisprudence, the basic principle upon which people become religious authorities is that other Muslims recognize their knowledge of religion and respect their interpretations of the faith, called *fatwas*.¹⁷ In effect, Sunni Islam has a free market system of religious interpretation regulated only by weakly institutionalized informal norms. Under different circumstances, this nature can support rigid or flexible, and pro-modern or conservative interpretations.¹⁸

With less regulation of community-based Islamic networks in Turkey, interpretations that are politically-economically liberal but socially conservative, or interpretations that have dubious feasibility, may gain more voice.¹⁹ For example, both types of teachings may endorse women's participation in the labor force. However, community-based Islam may argue that segregation of the sexes is necessary for such participation, or that polygamy is acceptable, while state-sponsored Islam shuns interpretations undermining formal gender equality. Another example is while both types of teachings would endorse financial development, community-based Islamic teachings may argue that Islamic, interest-free banking should be encouraged.²⁰

Finally, for secularists, radical Islam is easier to vilify and to justify restricting within democracy. Moderate Islam's zeal to embrace modernity life styles and its rejection of revolutionary methods make it hard to justify restricting it within democracy.

Thus, the fact that the AKP has not changed 'a single law that directly challenged the secular constitution' is little comfort to the party's opponents.²¹ The new breed of moderate-Islamic parties in the world has less ideological and state-centered, and more cultural and society-centered goals.²² Arguably, Islamism could not produce *political* projects envisioning Islamic states and political spheres with indigenously Islamic rules and goals.²³ Thus, its focus might have shifted to creating Islamic social spheres.

The program and the practice of the AKP indicate that its priorities lie in strengthening democracy and Islamic communities, and in promoting a more Islamic-conservative social and political mainstream. While doing this, the AKP encourages the development of Islamic life styles, values, and teachings more at home with modern life styles, especially for less modernized segments of society. This is good for the world for it helps Muslims to reconcile with modernity. Exactly this, however, may explain why ordinary citizens and civil society actors who normally fail to mobilize to participate in mass protests, mobilize against the AKP rule. People seem to be sensitive, or oversensitive from the perspective of the AKP, to the little signs of Islamization they observe in their daily lives.

Their threat perceptions grow as Islamists become more secular and thus more visible while remaining assertively religious. According to one survey, although the percentage of women covering their heads actually decreased between 1999 and 2006 from 69.1 to 60.2 per cent, most people (64.1 per cent) felt that the wearing of ‘headscarf or turban’ increased.²⁴ This apparent gap between fact and perception may partly reflect selective attention: people notice headscarf-wearing women more because of their fear of Islamization. It is also possible, however, that even though fewer women now cover their heads, more of them are wearing the Islamic type of headscarf (without calling it turban), and that they simultaneously have become more visible in public life.

For the democratic world, it may be desirable that Turkish society is peacefully transformed to a more democratic albeit a more Islamic-conservative society. However, this prospect may be objectionable to major portions of Turkish society who are comfortable with the current role of religion in society and who fear the gradual erosion of the advancements of the secular republic in areas such as women’s rights.

Secularist Concerns

In accordance with the above analysis, the three major complaints secularists express all regard piecemeal administrative decisions and the government’s social influence, not major legal-political changes.

The first is the public sector’s recruitment policies (*kadrolaşma*) under the AKP, which allegedly favor people with Islamic-conservative credentials such as people who graduated from religious *imam-hatip* schools.²⁵ There is no objective data to verify this claim; the AKP rejects these claims, and favoritism had been a pastime for past Turkish governments of a more secular kind also. However, with the AKP, *kadrolaşma* generates more reaction because of suspicions of gradual Islamization. The government missed several opportunities to dispel these doubts by displaying its commitment to meritocracy in appointments such as the Governor of the Central Bank.²⁶

Second, nowhere do *kadrolaşma* and other administrative practices draw more opposition than in education. Again, there is little hard evidence, except that about 800 civil servants were transferred from the Directorate of Religious Affairs to the Ministry of Education.²⁷ In universities, the party encouraged the appointment of rectors who are critical of secularist restrictions and tried to facilitate the admission of graduates of *imam-hatip* schools to universities.²⁸ The complaints regarding primary and secondary schools include the gradual Islamization of textbooks, for example by gradually replacing the theory of evolution with versions of creationism. The critics also charge that there is a tacit encouragement of Islamic-conservatism, for example by endorsing or encouraging the practice of *namaz* (Muslim praying), the distribution of religious reading material on school grounds, or teachers arguing that dating is sinful.²⁹ Insofar as they are true, these developments may be direct or indirect results of the AKP’s rule. Knowing the government’s Islamist roots, bureaucrats and civilians may feel that it is now more acceptable to promote religious values.

Third, the most controversial secularist claim regards the AKP’s pro-business and pro-globalization stand. Many secularists believe that the party is pursuing EU membership, democratization, and integration with the world economy because these provide the party more freedom in pursuing its agenda of gradual Islamization. The process of EU-led democratization, and IMF-led economic restructuring began under the coalition government

before the AKP but gained momentum during the AKP government. Legal-political reforms solidified individual freedoms and reduced the military's institutional involvement in government. Teaching and broadcasting in Kurdish began in limited forms. Political stability provided by the single party government resulted in high economic performance. Inflation fell to below 10 per cent. Annual growth reached an average rate of 7.3 per cent between the years of 2002-2006. All these reforms moved Turkey closer to western standards and increased the world's confidence in Turkey's democracy and economy.

These developments led to unprecedented growth in foreign investments and EU involvement in Turkish affairs. Direct foreign investment in Turkey increased from 1.14 billion dollars in 2002 to 20 billion dollars in 2006.³⁰ This capital inflow, however, caused significant appreciation of the Turkish currency and contributed to a current account deficit reaching a record 8 per cent of the GNP. This deficit is mostly financed by foreign short- and long-term investments.

The secularist perception is that this economic environment makes it hard to oppose the AKP's alleged plans of gradual Islamization. 'Traditional safeguards', such as military interventions or the destabilization of governments through media campaigns have become much costlier than before: they may cause strong negative reactions from the EU and economic crises due to sudden outflows of foreign capital.

Democratic Consolidation

Democratic consolidation is a theoretical construction often described as democracy becoming 'the only game in town'.³¹ More specifically, it can be conceptualized as the strengthening of democracy such that it becomes *unthinkable* for the great majority of the political actors to limit the basic freedoms of others in society, and to employ authoritarian means to pursue political gain, even during severe political and socioeconomic crises. This definition only defines an ideal outcome which in practice can only be approximated. It is not an absolute state. Any democracy can revert to authoritarianism under certain circumstances.

Arguably, however, in an advanced democracy it would require major upheavals in circumstances for a reversal to become thinkable. By contrast, in unconsolidated democracies such reversals are easily "thinkable," creating a vicious circle. Knowing that overall commitment to democracy is low, people invest in authoritarian safeguards, which further diminish overall commitment to, and quality of, democracy.

Thus, democratic consolidation requires that the major political actors build a certain degree of trust among each other. Actors must believe that other actors will not use democracy to pursue goals that are fundamentally threatening to them. Otherwise, they will keep authoritarian practices such as supporting military interventions within their portfolio of thinkable practices. They will do so as a credible threat to deter their 'rival' actors from actions they see as unacceptable. They will also be willing to limit the democratic freedoms to prevent other actors from pursuing their unacceptable agenda.

From the secularists' perspective, the emergence of such trust requires that Islamic-conservative actors embrace secularism fully, i.e. not only instrumentally but as a long term commitment. According to this view, democratic consolidation hinges upon the consolidation of secularism. This view is prevalent among Turkish secularists. President and the Chief of Staff have accused the AKP of embracing secularism 'in words only'.³² In other words,

secularists accuse Islamists of ‘preference falsification’: embracing secularism publicly but not privately.³³

Democratic Consolidation and Secularism

Some preference falsification prevails among Turkish Islamists because politicians who dare to question secularism publicly face vicious public campaigns from the secularists. It is rational for party members to keep certain thoughts to themselves.

However, what they keep in private may not necessarily be an opposition to secularism altogether but adherence to a more Islamic version of secularism. Secularists and Islamic-conservatives have different conceptions of secularism, emphasizing different aspects of it. Islamic-conservatives highlight the aspect of freedom of religion. Secularists emphasize the separation of religion and state.³⁴

Rather than secularism consolidating democracy, one may argue that successful democratization consolidates secularism. There are many secular states that are not democracies. But all consolidated democracies have some type of a secular system whereby both aspects of secularism, i.e. freedom of religion and the autonomy of state affairs from religion, are generally provided. Despite the revival of religion’s social and political influence in recent decades, few doubt that people in these countries *generally* enjoy freedom of religion and the governments are practically ‘autonomous’ from religion.

The exact definition and boundaries of secularism differ across countries. But all established democracies have some type of a consolidated secular system enjoying acceptance by the majority of the social-political actors. The existing institutional entanglements of religion and state in these countries may be vestiges of the historical process of democratization when state tried to control religion, and religion was given a stake in government so that a certain degree of trust could emerge between these actors. In this sense, the ultimate insurance of secularism may be democratic consolidation. The current challenge for western democracies such as the UK and Germany, which managed to establish democratic consolidation vis-a-vis Christianity in the past, may be to achieve the same type of reconciliation with their Muslim minorities.

This thesis is consistent with Stepan’s thesis that democratic consolidation vis-à-vis religion requires a ‘twin tolerations’. Rather than a wall of separation between church and state, he argues, democratization requires ‘constant political construction and reconstruction of the twin tolerations’.³⁵ Stepan formulates twin tolerations in terms of three freedoms: the freedom of governments from any ‘constitutionally privileged’ influence by religious institutions; complete freedom of worship; and the freedom of the pious to express their values in civil society and politics unless these limit other people’s liberties.

However, Stepan does not specify how actors solve problems of trust during the construction and reconstruction of twin tolerations. The emergence of twin tolerations may be a particularly difficult process in predominantly Muslim countries where there potentially is a free market of religious interpretations.

Long Term Difficulties of Twin Tolerations and Democratization

The Turkish secularist rallies display both positive and negative characteristics with respect to democratic consolidation. On one hand, a frequent slogan in the rallies is ‘neither Shariah nor a coup, a democratic Turkey’. On the other hand, the secularist middle class may view the

military as a guarantor unless strong democratic checks and balances are created against perceived threats to secular democracy.

These democratic checks and balances should not be understood strictly as institutional constraints and divisions of powers (e.g. a reformed constitution). The question is whether or not effective checks and balances are created by the political system as a whole, i.e. its laws and institutions, customs and norms, political parties, and voters. For twin tolerations, these checks and balances should also be flexible enough to keep religious actors within the democratic game.

By comparison, the AKP and its constituency display a stronger rhetorical commitment to democracy. Western style democracy, Turkey's EU prospects, and open economy provide freedoms that help the pursuit of more religious freedoms and a revised secularism. However, whenever the EU integration seemed to work to protect secularist interests or to undermine an Islamic agenda, the AKP turned critical of the EU processes. This happened for example when the European Court of Human Rights turned down a Turkish woman's application against the headscarf ban, and when the EU pressured the AKP to withdraw its proposal to criminalize adultery.³⁶ The strength of the AKP's commitment to democracy is yet insufficiently clear when it requires the upholding of the freedoms of secularists and of disadvantaged groups such as ethnic Kurds, women, gays, or the Alevi minority who are demanding the same privileges as the Sunni Muslims. Importantly, it is also unclear what the party's reformed secularism would look like.

Such examples do not necessarily imply that the AKP's western outlook and democratic commitments are insincere. The AKP's ideology should be seen as an ongoing project. The party's constituency includes business groups and the Islamic middle class who stand to gain from economic integration with the world, which is made possible by a democratic system.³⁷ Furthermore, a large literature on the ideological moderation of religious parties suggests that ideological moderation follows political moderation.³⁸ If Turkey's democratization can be sustained, the AKP's moderation can also be sustained.

The path to sustained moderation is still a difficult process, however. Democratic consolidation will require continuing economic development and external support, and major ideological adaptation, from both secularists and Islamists, to be achieved and become sustainable. In particular, the military, which continues to enjoy high public prestige, will have to shed its long tradition of interfering in politics.³⁹ While a coup is unlikely, the military now seems to prefer 'softer' methods to influence politics, such as announcements criticizing the government and the involvement of the retired military officers in civil society organizations and the media. A military conflict with Iraqi Kurds may increase the military's weight in politics.⁴⁰ The rise of pan-Kurdish nationalism in the region poses a great threat to Turkish democracy.

A solid EU commitment to Turkey's EU prospects would greatly benefit democratic consolidation. Simultaneously, democratic consolidation itself would increase the Europeans' support of Turkey's membership, while reducing the public's support of the military's political role.

From the perspective of creating inter-actor trust, one weakness of the Turkish case is that the AKP does not call itself Islamist, or, for that matter, Muslim-democratic. This raises questions about the AKP's ability to speak for Islamists and make long-term commitments in their

name. For democratic consolidation, actors should be able to make ‘credible commitments’ to each other regarding the rules of democracy and the boundaries between religion and state.⁴¹ Its more conservative members and supporters may abandon the AKP if it continues to neglect Islamic priorities such as removing the restrictions on the wearing of headscarf, especially if economic benefits for its followers dwindle after a lost election or poor economic performance.

From the perspective of Muslims’ reconciliation with democratic modern world, another crucial question is how much the AKP will manage to be an agent of indigenous ideological change, by encouraging the development of arguments in favor of pluralist democracy that are ‘deeply embedded in [Islam’s] comprehensive doctrine’.⁴² The Muslim world faces many philosophical-intellectual challenges such as identifying the status of Shariah in modern democracies and how inherently ‘western’, and thus foreign, modernity is.⁴³

Trust and Ambiguity

The building of trust also requires that actors clearly articulate their positions. If actors do not know what the other parties’ interests are, or distrust that their expressed interests match their real, long-term interests, they may not participate in democratic bargaining and commit to their agreements. A greater problem in Turkey is that ambiguous policy positions encourage actors to speculate about, and exaggerate, how radical the others’ positions really are.

A recent example is the so-called ‘bikini controversy’. In the spring of 2007, the secularist media reported some swimsuit producers’ complaints about the municipality of Istanbul, which is run by the AKP. Allegedly, the administration was rejecting billboard applications for swimsuit advertisements showing models in bikinis. Secularist commentators argued that this was yet another example of ‘creeping Islamization’.⁴⁴ Most importantly for the subject here, the AKP did not defend its practices. Rather, the party simply denied that such a policy existed. Bikini ads reappeared on Istanbul streets.

In a consolidated democracy, this could be a ‘normal’ debate regarding the use of the female body in commercials. The AKP could claim for example that some of these advertisements objectify women, or simply that they are inappropriate in a majority Muslim culture. In this case, the voters could make an informed decision about who is right. Rather than seeing in this debate a fundamental threat to secularism, secularist actors would see an Islamic-conservative policy that could be revoked in the next election. As it happened in the Turkish case, however, the fact that the government denied its actions raised the question of whether it conceals its intentions in other areas also. Ambiguity lends credibility to exaggerated charges about intentions.

The bikini controversy epitomizes a general phenomenon. Facing secularist criticism of its actions regarding more important questions than the bikini controversy, say the legal definition of secularism or education policies, the AKP simply denies or withdraws its actions. The point here is not a normative one. The previous Islamist party in government, the Welfare Party, was forced to resign in 1997 as a result of a vicious media campaign and Islamist ‘witch hunt’ with the active involvement of the military. Against this background, any policy position the AKP justifies on Islamic grounds risks being presented as a sign of the party’s hidden Islamist intentions.

The point is that this environment where the party fails to clearly articulate where it stands on issues of secularism and social regulation undermines the emergence of twin tolerations that is

necessary for democratic consolidation. Such pressures also exist upon secularist democrats who may be willing to be more accepting of moderate Islamist actors. They are vulnerable to accusations of catering to Islamists.

The Political Party System

Finally, the major factor weakening the prospects for democratic consolidation is the weaknesses of the Turkish political party system. The system has some relative strengths.⁴⁵ But it fails to encourage the recruitment of able individuals into politics, intra-party policy debates, the production of party programs with effective solutions to societal problems, compromise among parties, and parties efficiently communicating with their constituencies. The AKP owes part of its success to its relative overcoming of these weaknesses. Secularist political parties' weaknesses undermine their ability to effectively check and balance the AKP. Their potential constituencies do not view them as reliable forces that can democratically protect their values and serve their long-term social and economic interests. Parties weak in the sense here also have a weak capacity to establish trust between each other, and to make long term compromises and commitments necessary for democratic consolidation.

Military interventions and legal restrictions that the military rule in 1980-83 placed on party organizations and activities are a major reason parties failed to establish strong organizations and ties with civil society. In addition, frequent economic crises deprived parties of stable constituencies: electoral volatility has been high across individual parties.⁴⁶ Furthermore, parties suffer from 'internal party feuds and factional splits', and 'party switching among parliamentarians'.⁴⁷ Especially but not exclusively in Eastern Turkey, political patronage and clientelism continue to influence the preferences of major portions of the voters.

These problems of the party system were aggravated during the 1990s. Strong leaders remained in control of their parties despite widespread corruption and the steady erosion of voter support for their parties. As one author put it 'in a political landscape of kleptocracy run by a gerontocracy, there is little sign that political parties are run by democracy and it is a rare Turkish politician who pays heed to the electorate and voluntarily relinquishes power'.⁴⁸ Not surprisingly, voter support shifted steadily away from the center-right and center-left parties, toward the religious and nationalist parties on the right which were seen as less corrupt.⁴⁹

Religious parties had strong organizations with dedicated grassroots cadres, which helped them to increase their electoral support. In addition, the AKP established a modern organization credited with establishing strong ties of communication with the voters. Initially, the AKP also managed to create a more egalitarian intra-party democracy than any other Turkish party, although it somewhat retreated to authoritarianism after coming to power.⁵⁰ The AKP may also be suffering from 'power malaise', which may explain some allegations of corruption against the party members and why it insisted on electing its own candidate for President rather than seeking a compromise with the opposition.

By comparison, the AKP's rivals suffer from all of the mentioned weaknesses and from fragmentation of similar parties. It is not clear whether attempts to merge the main opposition party CHP (Republican People's Party) with the DSP (Democratic Left Party), and, two center-right parties, DYP (True Path Party) and ANAP (Motherland Party) will survive personal conflicts and produce stable parties.

Fragmentation and weakness generate a political style which rewards confrontation rather than compromise, and power politics rather than policy creation. In this political party culture, ‘leaders are seen as heroes defending their parties against adversaries and the primary preoccupation is with “politics” rather than policy’.⁵¹ The way to rise in politics is through loyalty to the leaders and avoiding policy debates.

Yet, the goal of preventing Islamization within democracy, which secularist parties claim to pursue, requires that these parties produce effective policies and solutions in areas from economics to foreign policy, which would enable them to repeatedly win elections. It also requires that secularist parties threaten to attract some of the AKP’s more moderate constituency by offering democratic solutions to questions such as the headscarf controversy, and a conciliatory rhetoric that would embrace rather than alienate pious voters. If they succeed, they can effectively balance the AKP, helping the latter to maintain its moderation. If they fail, ‘radical secularism’ may reverse Islamist moderation and widen the secularist-Islamist cleavage in Turkish society they so fear.⁵²

Absent ‘strong’ and democratic secularist political parties, secularist mobilization may fall prey to extreme nationalism and authoritarian tendencies that would endanger democratic consolidation. Absent such parties, the speakers and organizers of the rallies tend to express more radical nationalistic and authoritarian views than do most of the participants, and, the participants express what unites them: their patriotism, and the symbolism of Atatürk and his philosophy. But it would hurt their interests if their unprecedented political mobilization produced extreme-nationalist policies undermining Turkey’s EU relations and economic integration with the world.

For democratic consolidation, the concerns of the secularist mobilization need to be translated by political parties into democratic policies and programs. These need to explain what secularists propose in terms of political reforms and socio-economic policies, and address a number of essential tradeoffs that secularists face. Is secularism more important than democracy? How would secularist policies protect secularism without polarizing society? How would they protect secularism while at the same time advancing democratization, economic development, and EU relations?

Prospects for Democratic Consolidation

The challenge for Turkey is to ensure that its ideological differences—especially in education, public recruitment, and social life—are sorted out democratically, not by rallies on the streets or by resorting to authoritarian forces.⁵³

A major factor increasing the prospects for democratic consolidation is economic development. In 2006, the per capita income reached \$8,600, which is one and a half times the \$6,000 threshold beyond which democratic reversals are considered to be highly unlikely.⁵⁴ Given what they have to lose, the bourgeoisie and the middle classes are unlikely to favor a democratic reversal. Nevertheless, a future economic crisis would challenge both the AKP’s unity as a party and democratic consolidation.

In the long run, democratic consolidation requires a strong political party system where secularist and religious-conservative parties effectively check and balance each other. The Turkish experience shows that free elections coupled with a guided democracy and economic development can generate incentives for political Islam to moderate and to adopt democracy.

But it also suggests that *sustainable* moderation by Islam coupled with democratic *consolidation* may require strong secularist democrats as much as it requires Muslim democrats.

The legal reforms since the 1990s, which removed some of the vestiges of the military rule and eased the restrictions on political party activities, encourage all Turkish parties to build better ties with their constituencies.⁵⁵ These reforms should be supplemented with more reforms to fight political corruption and to improve intra-party democracy. For a better-functioning democracy, the 10 per cent national electoral threshold should also be reduced.

Finally, democratic consolidation requires that political parties build a consensus around goals they can agree on. Potential such goals include better democracy and human rights, economic development, sustainable EU relations, and preventing the rise of radical Islamism and extreme nationalism. Such a consensus should also envision an educational system that enables future generations, religious or not, to reason freely and critically and to choose the good life for themselves while respecting the freedoms of others in society. In the long run, this may be the ultimate guarantor of secular democracy as well as religious freedoms, and would have positive implications well beyond Turkey's borders.

Notes

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³ S Tavernise, 'Government of Turkey Warns Army', *New York Times*, 29 April 2007; 'Government Hits Back at Military Interference in Election Process', *Today's Zaman*, 28 April 2007; G Göktürk, 'Who Acted How in the Face of Military's Warning', *Turkish Daily News*, 5 May 2007.

⁴ H B Kahraman, *Türk Sağı ve AKP* (Turkish Right and the AKP), Istanbul: Agora, 2007. The party's founders split from the more conservative Islamist *Fazilet* (Virtue) party when they lost in 2000 the election for that party's presidency by a close margin. The AKP won the 2002 elections when Turkish voters decided to destroy the mainstream parties which they blamed for the financial crises of 2000 and 2001. For the party's emergence see Z Öniş & E F Keyman, 'A New Path Emerges', *Journal of Democracy*, 14 (2), April 2003, pp 95-107; and H M Yavuz (ed), *The Emergence of A New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Parti*, Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2006.

⁵ For two informative interviews with Abdullah Gül in 2000, see *Yeni Şafak*, 27 March, and *Radikal*, 5 June.

⁶ For Turkey's secular modernization, see among others F Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, New York: Routledge, 1993; S Bozdoğan & R Kasaba (eds), *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997; Ş Mardin, 'Türk Modernleşmesi, Makaleler 4' (Turkish Modernization, Essays 4), Istanbul: İletişim, 2003 and Ş Mardin, 'Turkish Islamic Exceptionalism Yesterday and Today: Continuity, Rupture and Reconstruction in Operational Codes', *Turkish Studies*, 6 (2), 2005, pp 145-165.

⁷ Among others, J L Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality*, Revised Edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995; and Nasr, 'The Rise of Muslim Democracy'. For a recent critical account, see J Schwedler, *Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

⁸ Among others, 'Secularists Stage Mass Protest in Turkey', *International Herald Tribune*, 13 May 2007.

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¹⁰ ‘Stability Doubts Despite Early Elections Move’, *International Herald Tribune*, 3 May 2007.

¹¹ ‘Secularism versus Democracy’, *Economist*, 3 May 2007.

¹² S Tavernise, ‘Turkish Presidential Candidate Withdraws, as Voting Stalls Again’, *New York Times*, 7 May 2007.

¹³ Among others, A Buğra, ‘Political İslam in Turkey in Historical Context: Strengths and Weaknesses’, in N Balkan & S Savran (eds), *The Politics of Permanent Crisis: Class, Ideology and State in Turkey*, New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc, 2002, pp 107-144; E F Keyman & B Koyuncu, ‘Globalization, Alternative Modernities and the Political Economy of Turkey’, *Review of International Political Economy*, 12 (1), 2005, pp 105-128 and European Stability Initiative, *Islamic Calvinists: Change and Conservatism in Central Anatolia*, Berlin/Istanbul: European Stability Initiative, 2005.

¹⁴ For competing accounts of Turkish secularism see Ş Mardin ‘*Türk Modernleşmesi, Makaleler 4*’ and ‘Turkish Islamic Exceptionalism Yesterday and Today’, and N Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, New York: Routledge, 1998. For accounts of ‘laicism vs. secularism’, and ‘objective and subjective secularization’ of Turkish religious markets, see A Davison, ‘Turkey, ‘A Secular’ State?: The Challenge of Description’, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 102 (2/3), 2003, pp 333-350; M Introvigne, ‘Turkish Religious Market(s): A View Based on the Religious Economy Theory’, in M H Yavuz (ed), *The Emergence of a New Turkey*, pp 23-48; and E F Keyman, ‘Modernity, Secularism and Islam: the Case of Turkey’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 24 (2), 2007, pp 215-234.

¹⁵ See J Fox, ‘World Separation Religion and State into the 21st Century’, *Comparative Political Studies*, 39 (5), June 2006, pp 537-569; and A Stepan, ‘Religion, Democracy, and the Twin Tolerations’, in L Diamond, M F Plattner & P J Costopoulos (eds), *World Religions and Democracy*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005, pp 3-23.

¹⁶ For empirical evidence on these points, A Çarkoğlu & B Toprak, *Değişen Türkiye’de Din, Toplum ve Siyaset* (Religion, Society, and Politics in Changing Turkey), İstanbul: TESEV Yayınları, 2006.

¹⁷ Among others, A Filali-Ansary, ‘Muslims and Democracy’, in L Diamond, et al, *World Religions and Democracy*.

¹⁸ For a recent commentary based on other Muslim countries, M Sackman, ‘A Fatwa Free-For-All in the Islamic World’, *International Herald Tribune*, Monday, 11 June 2007. The ‘moderate center in Turkish religious markets’ could prevent a conservative outcome. Introvigne, ‘Turkish Religious Market(s)’, p 41.

¹⁹ For deregulation leading to ‘vitality’ in religious markets, among others, L R Iannaccone, R Finke, and R Stark, ‘Deregulation of Religion: The Economics of Church and State’, *Economic Inquiry*, 35 (2), 1997, pp 350-364.

²⁰ See T Kuran, *Islam and Mammon: The Economic Predicaments of Islamism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004 for an extensive discussion of Islamism and economics.

²¹ ‘Secularism versus Democracy’, *Economist*, 3 May 2007.

²² Nasr, ‘The Rise of Muslim Democracy’.

²³ For the argument Islamism failed to create a political model, see O Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.

²⁴ Çarkoğlu and Toprak, *Değişen Türkiye’de Din, Toplum ve Siyaset*’.

²⁵ Among others, see S Tavernise, ‘Presidential Pick in Turkey Is Sign of A Rising Islamic Middle Class’, *New York Times*, 25 April 2007.

²⁶ See ‘Turkey Calms Markets with Appointment’, *International Herald Tribune*, 18 April 2006. For a critical account, see Y Kanlı, ‘Eligibility or Ideology’, *Turkish Daily News*, 2 April 2006.

²⁷ ‘Diyanetten MEB’e 836 Nakil’, (836 Transfers from Religious Affairs to Education Ministry) *Radikal*, 13 May 2007.

²⁸ ‘The AKP Government’s Attempt to Move Turkey from Secularism to Islamism (Part 1): The Clash with Turkey’s Universities’, *MEMRI Special Dispatch Series*: 1014, 1 November 2005.

²⁹ See ‘Parents Reveal Scandal at High Schools’, *Turkish Daily News*, 1 June 2007; ‘Prayer Scandal at Bağcılar High School’, *Today’s Zaman*, 15 June 2007. See also S Tavernise, ‘A Secular Turkish City Feels Islam’s Pulse Beating Stronger, Causing Divisions’, *New York Times*, 1 June 2007.

³⁰ Statistics of the Turkish Treasury.

³¹ J L Linz & A Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

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³² Among others, 'Top General Calls for A Cross-Border Operation to Northern Iraq', *Turkish Daily News*, 13 April 2007; 'System Faces Its Greatest Threat Since 1923', *Turkish Daily News*, 14 April 2007.

³³ For preference falsification among Islamists, see Kuran, *Islam and Mammon*.

³⁴ Among others, see 'Sezer: Definition of Secularism Clear', *Turkish Daily News*, 6 February 2007; F Dıslı, 'Sezer Stokes Secularism Debate', *Today's Zaman*, 7 February 2007.

³⁵ Stepan, 'Religion, Democracy, and the Twin Tolerations', p 8.

³⁶ See, H Smith, 'Turkey Split by Plan to Criminalize Adultery', *Guardian*, 6 September 2004; F Zakaria, 'How Not to Win Muslim Allies', *Newsweek*, 27 August 2004; V Boland, 'Mutual Incomprehension between Turkey and EU', *Financial Times*, 27 August 2006.

³⁷ See references in note 13.

³⁸ S N Kalyvas, 'Unsecular Politics and Religious Mobilization', in T Kselman & J A Buttigieg (eds), *European Christian Democracy*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003, pp 293-320.

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⁴⁰ An unsuccessful military adventure in Iraq may also decrease the military's prestige and status in society.

⁴¹ Kalyvas, 'Unsecular Politics and Religious Mobilization' and Mecham, 'From the Ashes of Virtue'.

⁴² Stepan, 'Religion, Democracy, and the Twin Tolerations', p 8.

⁴³ For the importance of philosophical questions such as these, see among others A Filali-Ansary, 'Muslims and Democracy'.

⁴⁴ Among others, H Smith, 'Fury at Turkish Ban on Bikini Ads', *Guardian*, 22 May 2007.

⁴⁵ Among others, see S Sayarı & Y Esmer (eds), *Politics, Parties, and Elections in Turkey*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002.

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⁴⁷ Sayarı & Esmer (eds), *Politics, Parties, and Elections in Turkey*.

⁴⁸ Lowry, 'Betwixt and Between', p 24.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Also see Sayarı, 'The Changing Party System'.

⁵⁰ Among others, S Tepe, 'A Pro-Islamic Party? Promises and Limits of Turkey's Justice and Development Party', in M H Yavuz (ed), *The Emergence of A New Turkey*, pp 107-135.

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⁵³ 'Secularism and Democracy in Turkey', *New York Times*, 1 May 2007.

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