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Moderation of religious and secular politics, a country's "centre" and democratization

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Based on a within-case comparative analysis of Turkish democratization since the 1920s and data on elite values, this article develops a general theoretical framework to better explain the moderation of religious and secular politics and democratization. First, it is maintained that the content of moderation and its effects on democracy will vary across countries depending on its domestic and international context – called a country's "centre" – and political rivals' reactions. Second, moderation can further democratization only insofar as it happens with a democratic centre. Third, absent a democratic centre, moderation may involve adoption, retention and reproduction of the centre's undemocratic attributes. In such cases, the challenge of democratization is not moderation per se but the construction of a new, democratic centre by transcending the existing centre. Fourth, moderation is interactive between religious and secular actors, multidimensional and reversible. Turkish democratization began with the moderation of authoritarian-secular actors, but generated only a semi-democracy because the changes were not institutionalized through explicit and formal compromises to produce a fully democratic centre. Turkish political Islamism moderated during the 1990s. But, despite major achievements, democratization remained ambiguous under the rule of moderate Islamists because they compromised and associated themselves with the semi-democratic centre, and secular-religious cooperation failed while some secular actors de-moderated.

Keywords: democratization; moderation; religious politics; secular politics; centre; political Islam; Turkey; Muslim countries

Introduction

How does the Turkish case help us to theorize better what moderation of religious and secular politics entail, and when and how moderation can lead to successful democratization? The emergence of Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in the late 1990s and early 2000s marked an important transformation of Turkish political Islamism and democracy. Modern Turkey was built during the 1920s and 1930s through radical secular reforms that sidelined

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Muslim-conservative elites and founded a secular nation state and mainstream social and economic institutions in a predominantly Muslim-conservative society. Through the partial moderation of secular practices and transition to multiparty politics, the political system was consolidated as an electoral but illiberal democracy during the 1950s and 1960s. Explicitly political Islamist movements and parties entered the political scene during the 1970s. They had a pragmatic and dynamic but predominantly anti-systemic and religious discourse and ideology, which targeted Turkey's uneven development and pro-Western and secular mainstream orientation. The AKP was rooted in this tradition. By 2002 when it came to power, however, it had adopted a pro-Western, liberal-democratic and globalist discourse in which religion did not figure saliently. This development was hailed by many as the moderation of political Islamism and the dawn of "Muslim democrats and Muslim democracy".¹ Yet, despite favourable conditions and major democratic achievements of the AKP such as the curtailment of military praetorianism, the overall record of democratization has been disappointing, especially since 2007.²

How can we explain this transformation of Turkish political Islamism and its ambiguous impact on democratization? Moderation of religious politics, which is a major theoretical construction that current research employs to address such questions in Turkey and elsewhere, remains a poorly defined and slippery concept.³ What will determine the nature of democratization in emerging post-Arab Spring polities such as Egypt and Tunisia where "moderate" Islamists have become major political actors? By analysing the evolution of religious as well as secular politics and democracy in Turkey since the 1920s, I develop in this article a conceptual-theoretical framework to address these questions.

I argue that one cannot adequately theorize moderation by focusing on political Islamist actors alone and on a single period of their evolution, such as that of the emergence of the AKP. It is necessary to examine both religious and secular actors over time. The Turkish case exhibits various sub-periods when religious or secular actors moderated and sometimes de-moderated. This provides significant analytical leverage to develop more general theoretical and empirical implications, through within-case comparisons and a focus on causal processes. These within-case comparisons show that the actors' reasons for, and the causes, content, and consequences of moderation do not remain constant. They depend on the changing social, political and international context of moderation.

I call this mainstream context of moderation a country's *centre*.⁴ Pending an elaborate conceptualization in the next section, I consider a country's centre broadly to capture the main attributes of the mainstream social-economic, political and external environment of that country at a certain time. While their impact should not be seen deterministically, I argue that these attributes restrain political actors and influence their understandings of how to become and remain major power holders. Thus, they mould the content and consequences on democracy of moderation, whenever it occurs.

Accordingly, I define moderation as an adjustment to at least some attributes of the centre in a particular country at a certain time. Moderation theories always treat moderation as some kind of an adaptation, willingness to cooperate or compromise, and focus on discovering which interests or ideological attributes make it happen.⁵ But they do not specify “to what” the moderating actors adapt, or “with what” they cooperate or compromise. Is it the median voters, the mainstream political institutions or culture, westernization, a universally defined conception of democracy and pluralism, or, in the case of religious parties, an acceptance of secularism? One implication of my definition of moderation is that only some features of moderation, such as a predilection for non-violence, can be conceptualized universally. The rest of what moderation entails can be expected to vary cross-nationally and cross-temporally because moderation entails adjustment to different contexts, that is centres in each case. This is why moderation seems to be a slippery concept. Its content is a variable by definition.

For example, the moderation of Turkey’s secularists during the 1940s meant a compromise with the social component of the centre, which reflected the preferences of religious-conservative voters, and with the centre’s shifting international component following World War II. Hence, Turkish secularists moderated by becoming more open to public religion and by adopting electoral democracy and a more pro-Western foreign policy. By comparison, the moderation of Turkish Islamists had a very different content because the centre they adjusted to was very different. Islamists compromised with existing attributes of the centre by curtailing religious, anti-secular and anti-Western rhetoric. And, they adjusted to new attributes of the centre by embracing the goal of European Union (EU) membership, integration with global markets and the rhetoric of liberal democracy.

In the same way that the content of moderation changed cross-temporally within the Turkish case, one can expect it to vary across countries. A moderating actor would clash as well as compromise with widely different values, interests, actors and institutions which constitute the centres in, say, Iran, Egypt, Indonesia, and Belgium.

This framework of explaining moderation helps to better explicate the relationship between moderation and democratization.⁶ It implies that one can expect moderation to contribute to democratization only insofar as it occurs in a country where the centre already has mainly democratic attributes. This would also help the moderating actor to ensure the cooperation of political rivals.

Without a fully democratic centre, Turkey’s moderate AKP – which accomplished major democratic reforms under particular domestic and external conditions during its first term – adopted democratic properties only as far as the centre itself was democratic. Meanwhile, many secular actors were threatened and radicalized by AKP rule, because the centre lacked sufficiently effective and neutral democratic institutions that could successfully mediate the material and ideological conflicts between religious and secular actors. Thus, the more the moderate AKP government consolidated its power and merged with the mainstream,

the more authoritarian it became, beginning to exclude its liberal supporters and to reproduce the semi-democratic centre in a more religious-conservative form.

All this implies that the distinction between normative and behavioural moderation, which many extant studies address, may not be so crucial for democratization.⁷ Instead, the crucial question is *which* ideas, norms *and* types of behaviour a moderating actor is adopting. These, I maintain, are significantly determined by the nature of a country's centre. Arguably, moderation always includes some ideational component.⁸ The narrative of the Turkish case will show that the moderation of both political secularism and Islamism entailed important ideational as well as behavioural changes. At the same time, these changes failed to consolidate full democracy sometimes because the ideational changes were rather selective and poorly institutionalized and sometimes because de facto behavioural changes were not legitimized through explicit ideational compromises. In short, they were not supported by and did not lead to the building of a fully democratic centre.

The argument complements research on the transformation of Turkish Islamism. We have a plethora of partial explanations: economic liberalization;⁹ political learning;¹⁰ political party system and voter preferences;¹¹ globalization, modernization and Turkish Sufi Islam;¹² the EU and relations between the Western world and Muslims;¹³ Islam-state relations;¹⁴ political and institutional checks and balances;¹⁵ and secular rivals.¹⁶ While highly informative, however, current research does not offer conceptual tools to explain or predict the content and consequences of moderation. Take political economy explanations; they show that the emergence of a market-based bourgeoisie with religious-conservative roots contributed to moderation. But while a conservative bourgeoisie can be expected to support a more accountable government and liberal economy, it is unclear why they would also countenance social and political rights for workers, or, for that matter, ethnic and religious minorities. Similarly, extant studies can explain either the democratic accomplishments or failures of the AKP, but not both.¹⁷ By introducing the concept of the centre and focusing on both religious and secular actors, it becomes possible to explain why the AKP moderated and why it successfully led democratization in some areas but not in others.

Moderation, democracy and a country's "centre"

Extant studies usually do not offer a clear definition of moderation and, when they do, widely disagree on what it entails and the capacity of Islamists to moderate. For a diverse group of sceptics, moderation more or less amounts to upholding the norms and practices observed in Western, liberal and secular democracies.¹⁸ Optimists also offer a plethora of implicit and explicit definitions. Accordingly, moderation may involve a movement: towards acceptance of competitive politics and electoral and non-electoral constraints;¹⁹ from state-centred to society-centred, civil and reformist movements;²⁰ towards rapprochement and intermediation between opposing ideological groupings;²¹ from monopoly of religious truth to the acknowledgment of ambiguity and multiplicity;²² from closed to more open

worldviews tolerant of alternative truth-claims.²³ Notwithstanding all these different definitions, however, in practice moderates tend to be identified simply as those who do not want to “rock the boat”.²⁴

But why should moderation look and affect democratization the same way in different contexts where moderating parties would compromise with very different institutions, values and rival actors? For example, the prevailing institutions, rival secular actors and international allies in different countries would react differently to the moderation of an Islamist party, thereby influencing the consequences of moderation.

However, it is also true that moderation may have some generalizable characteristics such as non-violence. Hence, it can be argued that the concept of moderation consists of universal and country specific dimensions. Table 1 illustrates that it has some general manifestations such as a relative potential for openness to different worldviews. Other manifestations of moderation, however, can only be identified meaningfully in reference to the centre of a particular country.

I maintain that the concept of centre has three components. The political-institutional component refers to the characteristics, values and interests of the dominant state institutions and agents, and of the dominant actors in “political society”, such as the main political parties.²⁵ The social component involves the characteristics, values and interests of the median voters and of the dominant actors in civil society, including the main economic power holders and the intelligentsia. The international component captures the external context of moderation, and denotes the main international alliances and position of the country in global politics and economy.

Table 1. Universal and country-specific dimensions of moderation.

Universal dimension	Country-specific dimension
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential openness to other worldviews and to peaceful competition, cooperation and compromise with other actors • Ability to relax ideological priorities for appealing to greater segments of voters • Preference for peaceful political strategies 	<p>Compromise with <i>the centre</i>. Depends on the qualities and behaviour of the centre in a particular country</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political-institutional component of the centre (e.g. secularist and Islamic state institutions in Turkey and Iran respectively) • Social component of the centre (e.g. the preferences of the moderately pious and (Turkish) nationalist median voters in Turkey) • International component of the centre (for example Turkey’s long-term Western alliances with the US and the EU, and, since the 1980s, extensive embeddedness in global economy)

The overall strength and cohesiveness of the centre would vary across societies. As an anchor and pull factor, the centre's impact on the moderation of religious politics would depend on such variables as how cohesive the centre is, how strongly it is embraced by a unified group of elites, how extensively and effectively the values associated with the centre are promoted in areas such as education and the media, and how attractive the political and economic benefits of reconciling with the centre are.

The relative importance of the centre's different components in affecting moderation would also vary across cases and time. One could hypothesize, for example, that the weight of the social component would be higher the more elections are free and fair, and the more autonomy elected governments enjoy in a country. Similarly, dependence on international alliances and integration with the world economy would increase the weight of the international component.

But it is inherent in the idea of a centre that these relative weights cannot be predicted easily and decisively. If it were simple to identify them *ex ante*, all actors could similarly and correctly predict how rewarding moderation would be in terms of legal and political consequences such as societal support, ability to govern and political rivals' and allies' reactions. Thus, moderation would not provide any extra political advantage to those actors who successfully moderate. In other words, different actors can give different normative as well as strategic responses to the same centre, and there can be successful and failing attempts to moderate. Successful moderates are those who outperform their competitors in gauging which specific compromises to make, with which components of the center, and when. As we will see, the AKP turned out to be a successful moderate in the Turkish case because it made these choices better than other actors and with the right timing.

Because the process of moderation entails an initially anti-systemic actor's adjustment to a country-specific context, in partial democracies (or, for that matter, non-democracies) it would be misleading to identify all moderates as democrats, because these partial democracies by definition lack a democratic centre. Without a democratic centre that promotes democratic standards, moderates would tend to adopt the centre's democratic as well as semi-democratic and authoritarian features. In regard to issues on which the centre lacks democratic standards, mainstream institutions would not compel or encourage moderating actors to cooperate, adopt pluralistic positions and compete with each other on a pluralist platform and discourse.²⁶

Indeed, as the following analytical narrative will illustrate, full democracy failed to materialize in Turkey despite the occurrence of both religious and secular moderation in different periods.

1920–1945: the emergence of the secularist political centre

In this period, top-down reforms built a Turkish nationalist, secularist and authoritarian centre with a state-led economy, mainly "Muslim-conservative" society and growing secular social-political elite. The centre's international component was

westernizing, pursuing a neutral foreign policy and limited explicit alliances with Western powers.²⁷

This formative phase of the secular Turkish Republic spanned the opening of the Grand National Assembly during the War of Independence (1920–1922), the promulgation of the Republic and a new constitution (1923–1924), the constitutional recognition of the secularism principle in 1937, and the end of World War II. Between the secularist and Islamist elites of modernization that emerged during the late Ottoman times, the peculiar conditions of the War of Independence enabled the former to become hegemonic and unilaterally build the centre during this period.²⁸ The secular-nationalist Republican People's Party (CHP) was founded by Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938). The CHP's single-party regime sidelined the Islamist-modernizing elites often despite societal opposition.²⁹

The CHP abolished the Caliphate, consolidated a unified and secular education system, secularized the legal system *in toto*, minimized religious education and brought religious endowments under state control, legislated mostly equal civil and political rights for women, banned Sufi orders, lodges and holy shrines except for a few, and vernacularized *ezan* (call to prayer). In many ways, these reforms were anti-clerical and anti-ancient regime (Ottoman), aiming to privatize Islam à la French laicism.³⁰ In other ways, they continued late-Ottoman modernization and were inspired by modernist Islamism, aiming to control as well as reform religion.³¹

The pro-secular political centre came to include the military, the CHP and a stream of centre-right parties after transition to multiparty politics in the next period. Later, it also developed strong state institutions such as the judiciary. A main goal of secularist reforms – echoing later efforts of Islamists to nurture a religious-conservative “counter-elite” – especially in the educational realm was to promote a pro-secular intelligentsia and urban middle class.³² Thus, over time, the social component of the centre evolved to entail predominantly pro-secular academia and intelligentsia, media organizations, and business, labour and professional associations. It also included the median voters who remained predominantly Muslim-conservative but whose preferences were undoubtedly affected by secular education and social-economic modernization.

What were the long-term consequences of the secularist centre established in this period? On the positive side, it helped Turkey develop “an overarching national identity” and achieve “the level of political, economic and cultural development it has reached today”.³³ On the deficit side, the authoritarian and unilateral way it was built generated a disgruntled group of Muslim-conservative modernizers,³⁴ arguably creating one of the deeper fissures that typically emerged between secular-nationalist and Islamist elites in Muslim countries, in response to modernization and westernization.³⁵

Coercive institutions such as the military formed a main pillar of the centre. However, what made Turkish secular modernization relatively successful in terms of both its own survival and democratic development, and a major factor

that distinguished Turkish secular-nationalists from their counterparts such as the Baathists in Iraq and Syria, was their relative moderation during the 1940s.

1946–1969: the emergence of a semi-democratic centre

The CHP's establishment of multiparty politics in 1946 reflected moderation in the universal sense described in Table 1, that is, openness to peaceful competition with rival actors. Soon thereafter, the party took actions along the country-specific dimension of moderation, such as the reopening of shrines and tombs of saints in 1947. Thus, the CHP moved closer to the values of the Turkish median voters. The CHP then peacefully relinquished power when it lost the elections to the Democrat Party (DP) in 1950.³⁶

The DP was formed by former CHP members representing its economically more entrepreneurial and liberal and religiously more conservative wing. Threatened by Soviet expansionism soon after World War II, Turkey sought entry to, and joined, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952. Thus, interests and calculations such as joining the Western camp, CHP leaders' belief that they would carry the elections, and the DP's assurances that it would not dismantle secularism contributed to democratic transition.³⁷

But ideational factors were also important. The CHP entailed actors with "hard-line-secular" (authoritarian and anti-religious) and "moderate-secular" (secularist but relatively open to democratic competition, public religion, or both) ideals. While some CHP functionaries were unapologetic autocrats, the long-term vision of others who were conditional democrats included democracy and power-sharing.³⁸

The DP also represented moderate religious interests. On one hand, the DP restored the call to prayer in Arabic, lifted the ban on religious radio programmes, opened state-run religious *imam-hatip* schools, built more mosques and displayed a generally more tolerant stand towards Sufi Islam. On the other hand, the DP accepted the centre's secular character and remained loyal to the essence of the Kemalist reforms. It did not try to restore the Caliphate, the abolition of which had caused much resentment among Islamists. Nor did it try to cancel the constitutional principle of secularism. A political party charged with anti-secularism was closed in 1951, and the suppression of Sufi orders continued during the DP rule, albeit more moderately.

This twin moderation of secular and Muslim political actors presented a golden opportunity for the building of a democratic centre. However, this opportunity was missed when the CHP and the DP both became consumed by antagonistic bickering and increasingly authoritarian.

Neither the CHP nor the DP had firmly liberal-democratic principles and unconditional commitment to pluralism and power-sharing. Political expediency and democratic aspirations led to the *de facto* moderation of each side's positions vis-à-vis power-sharing, religion and secularism. But there was no intellectual reconciliation between the two potentially mutually exclusive ideals of modernization – secularist-westernizing and Islamic – and no explicit compromise over the

principles of a more democratic secularism. Furthermore, Turkey's Western alliances, which had become a key component of the centre by then, prioritized stability and loyalty over democratic pluralism in the Cold War context.

The decade culminated in the military intervention of 1960–1961, which led to a new constitution envisioning a liberal-democratic political system and strengthened civil and political liberties. While the centre thus became equipped with the formal institutions and discourse of liberal-democracy, however, actual democracy remained guided and limited. The constitution curtailed legal politics with the ostensible aim of protecting democracy from Marxist, Kurdish-nationalist and political Islamist threats and legitimized the role of the military-bureaucratic elites (mainly the army and the judiciary) in restricting civilian politics, through such institutions as the Constitutional Court and the military-dominated National Security Council.

The military ejected elected governments in both 1971 and 1997, and took over power in 1980. But democratic politics was also constrained through the announcements of the military or the National Security Council, which civilian governments felt compelled to heed. Although political parties were freely established and contested elections and power rotated peacefully, the powers of elected governments remained limited with respect to “sensitive issues” such as “leftist, religious and ethnic radicalism”. Until 2001, the Constitutional Court shut down six political parties for violating secularism.

Nevertheless, secular moderation, electoral democracy and practical interactions between secular and Muslim actors brought about changes in the centre especially with respect to secularism, practically if not ideologically. Hence, contradicting some claims in extant research that exclusively focus on state attempts to suppress and privatize religion in many contexts,³⁹ the practice of Turkish state-dominated secularism (*laiklik*) increasingly evolved into an integrationist and accommodationist model. It diverged from both French laicism and American secularism, privately and publicly supporting Sunni Islam in some contexts while restricting both religious and secular freedoms in other contexts.⁴⁰ The Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) grew constantly and built mosques, educated imams, published religious materials and discriminated against non-Muslims and non-Sunni Muslims such as the Alevis.⁴¹ Centre-right politicians publicly competed on piety in return for votes. Despite the illegal status of explicit political Islamism, new “opportunity spaces” were created for Islamists and Sufi communities, which published newspapers, built dorms for poor students and trained Islamic intellectuals and politicians.⁴²

However, none of these de facto inclusive changes vis-à-vis public religion and religious actors occurred through explicit compromises. They occurred through the infiltration of the state bureaucracy, political patronage and the mobilization of illegal or semi-legal Islamic communities. While establishing interest-based pragmatic relations, neither Muslim nor secular politics settled their fundamental ideological conflicts with each other. While becoming more amorphous and practically more inclusive, the centre did not develop more inclusive formal principles coupled with the rights and norms of a more democratic secular model and political regime.

1970–1980: explicit political Islamism

Until the late 1990s, Islamist political parties were formed and dominated by the National Outlook movement (*Milli Görüş*, MG). The MG was founded in 1969 defending “Islamic values” and proposing an indigenous (*milli*) developmental path, as an alternative to “imitating the West”. Its charismatic founder, Necmettin Erbakan (1926–2011), declared that it was open to everybody except for “free masons, communists, and Zionists”.⁴³ The first MG party was shut down by the Constitutional Court soon after the coup of 1971. But its heir, the National Salvation Party MSP, became a junior partner in several coalition governments during the 1970s, with voter support around 10%.

The MG represented the de-moderation of Turkish Muslim politics. It was established by a group of dissidents from the moderate-conservative Justice Party, who distinguished themselves through their explicit Islamist identity and indomitable opposition to the secular centre. They attributed most of Turkey’s ills to the country’s secular-Western orientation. The MG called for moral as well as material development, more pro-small business economic policies protecting domestic industries, and a greater public role for religion.⁴⁴ Compared to the centre-right parties that launched a critique of *laiklik* from within, the MG was an anti-systemic movement.

Political, socioeconomic and ideational factors help to explain the emergence of the MG. Many Sufi movements found the pro-Islamic performance of centre-right parties unsatisfactory;⁴⁵ the failure of centre-right parties to reconcile the diverging interests of urban-based big business and countryside-based small and medium-sized businesses created a political gap;⁴⁶ the thinking of Muslim intellectuals had been changing through domestic experiences, internal debates and interactions with global ideas then in currency, which included Third World developmentalism and a revival of political Islamism from Iran to Sudan and Pakistan.⁴⁷

During the 1970s, the CHP also attempted to moderate again by adopting a more populist and social-democratic identity. Despite notable accomplishments such as the 1977 elections when the party won elections with 41% of the national vote, voters did not ultimately reward the CHP sufficiently to rule in single-party governments. Centre-right religious rivals responded antagonistically also, due to personal rivalries and their unbending ideological opposition to the left.⁴⁸ The military regime of 1980–1983 banned both the CHP and the MSP.

1980–1998: the clash of political Islamism and the secularist centre

The military junta tried to control and instrumentalize Islamist actors. It actively promoted a Muslim discourse and identity, while at the same time formally upholding the *laiklik* principle. The military government supported selected Sufi movements in accordance with the “Turkish-Islamic synthesis ideology” put forward as an antidote against the “Marxist threat”. The *Diyanet* became constitutionally tasked with promoting “national solidarity and unity” and compulsory religion courses were introduced in schools. Furthermore, while the military’s crackdown

targeted all “subversive ideologies”, it proved most destructive of the leftists and created a gap in Turkish politics, which was partially filled by Islamists in subsequent years.

The military also launched neo-liberal economic policies implemented by Turgut Özal, who became prime minister following the return to competitive politics in 1983. Thus, the centre’s international component became increasingly embedded in global markets. And, the social component increasingly came to include a religious-conservative bourgeoisie who benefited from Özal governments’ supportive policies vis-à-vis Muslim-conservative businesses.⁴⁹ This made the political centre’s secularist actors increasingly uncomfortable.

The AKP’s main predecessor, the Welfare Party (RP), was founded in 1983. Following its emergence as the winner of the 1995 national election, the RP became Turkey’s first MG party that came to power as the dominant partner of a coalition government. The RP was moderate in terms of many standards of the universal and country-specific dimensions of moderation. It embraced peaceful, electoral politics and was open to forming coalitions with rival political parties. Its platform was not exclusively religious, reflecting its efforts to seek the acceptance of the centre’s political component and to satisfy broader segments of the moderate-conservative social component.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, the RP’s “moderation” remained ambiguous. In fact, in some ways the RP radicalized (while the more radical Islamist groups that were loosely linked with the party moderated) during the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁵¹ While supportive of private business, the RP envisioned a state-led transformation of the socioeconomic system based on Islamic moral principles and the promise of a “just order” (*adil düzen*), which among other practices would end the charge of interest in economic transactions.⁵² It sought to revive an “authentic Islam” claimed to be central to Turkey’s identity.⁵³ The RP was very critical of state-controlled *laiklik*, demanding more religious autonomy and advocating legal pluralism modeled on the Medina Covenant Prophet Muhammad had made with non-Muslims.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the party would put an end to Turkey’s pursuit of EU membership, pro-West foreign policy, and membership in international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF).⁵⁵ Considering that Turkey signed a Customs Union with the EU in 1995, and the importance of its military-strategic relations with the USA and Israel, this anti-Western orientation put the party firmly at odds with the centre.

The government resigned in 1997, following a military-led public campaign, backed by major pro-secular media, business and labour organizations. The subsequent “February 28 process” cracked down on Islamic-conservative political and economic actors and launched reforms that were ostensibly aimed at stemming perceived Islamization. The Constitutional Court later closed the RP.

Paradoxically, secularists also tried to moderate during the 1990s. The CHP attempted to develop a more moderate secular ideology through the so-called “Anatolian left” idea, while struggling to cope with the intellectual challenges of globalization. But neither the CHP nor its nationalist-leftist rival the Democratic

Left Party (DSP) – which embraced a more lenient attitude towards religious conservatism – managed to overcome ideological fissures, create new forms of bonding with voters beyond political clientelism and secure major electoral successes.⁵⁶ While the DSP won the elections in 1999, it only got 22% of the vote by significantly benefiting from nationalist votes and could only head a coalition government.

1999–2002: moderation of reformist Islamists and the AKP

The AKP was founded by the reformers within the MG. Early elections were called soon after the financial crises of 2000 and 2001, the worst in the country's history. The AKP won the elections. Turkish voters had decided to punish the mainstream parties including the DSP, which they blamed for the crises, in favour of a new and “clean” party. The AKP perceptively named itself AK,⁵⁷ which means “clean” in Turkish. This highlights the contingent nature of the relationship between moderation and democratic success. At a different juncture, the moderation of the reformist Islamists could have been less successful.

But the AKP managed to exploit this opportune moment successfully because its founders had already decided and managed to reconcile with the changing centre more successfully than any other actor. After 1999, when the EU decided to declare Turkey an official candidate for membership, the EU and liberal democracy – the essence of the EU's Copenhagen criteria – began to penetrate the centre's international component. The ruling coalition government led by the DSP began to make EU-dictated democratic reforms. Simultaneously, the centre became more open to integration with global markets in search of new markets and foreign investment and as a result of the IMF-led liberal institutional reforms following the 2000–2001 financial crises.

Table 2 shows how the AKP's programme differed from those of its predecessors and the Felicity Party, SP, which continued the MG tradition, in five areas where the RP had clashed with the centre. The suppression of the Islamist MG legacy; avoiding the discourse of religion; adopting the discourse of liberal as opposed to majoritarian democracy; embracing Turkey's Western alliances and economic globalism. These changes helped the AKP to successfully gain relative acceptance by the political, economic and international components of the centre.

It can be shown that similar changes occurred in the predominant opinion of the religious-conservative intelligentsia, which suggests that the changes were not simply cosmetic. The following findings come from a comprehensive content analysis of religious and secular newspapers between the years 1996 and 2004.⁵⁸ Negative views denote critical views about a value such as human rights or an entity such as the EU, while positive views refer to supportive views. The numbers in the parentheses indicate how many times a view was coded, that is, how frequently it was expressed.

As Table 3 shows, following its clashes with the secularist centre, the religious press became more supportive of democracy in general, and their discourse shifted

Table 2. Comparative frequency of key terms in the successive Islamic Party programmes, in chronological order.

	MNP-Programme (per thousand words)	MSP-Programme (per thousand words)	RP-Programme (per thousand words)	FP-Programme (per thousand words)	SP-Programme (per thousand words)	AKP-Programme (per thousand words)
(1) MG tradition						
<i>Refah</i> (welfare) ^a			1.94	1.17	2.00	0.40
National (<i>milli</i>) ^b	5.11	3.33	7.78	2.33	1.00	0.67
(2) Discourse of religion						
Religion (<i>Din</i>)	0.15	3.33	3.61	3.33	2.58	1.88
Spirituality (<i>Maneviyat</i>)	2.75	2.78	3.89	0.66	1.92	0.27
Morality (<i>Ahlak</i>)	5.35	3.33	0.28	0.33	1.08	0.27
Freedom of religion	0.58	1.39	0.83	0.50	0.33	0.08
(3) Majoritarian versus liberal democracy						
National will (<i>milli irade</i>)	0.29	0.00	0.56	1.00	0.17	0.13
Minority ^c (<i>azınlık</i>)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.20
Civil society	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.67	1.48
Human rights	0.43	0.83	0.56	1.17	4.50	1.14
Freedom of thought	0.00	1.94	0.28	0.66	0.75	0.34
(4/5) Globalism and integration with the West						
Nation (<i>millet</i>)	5.51	3.33	5.00	3.50	3.00	0.60
International	0.72	1.11	3.28	0.17	4.33	3.42
Europe	0.14	0.00	0.28	0.33	1.50	1.07
Balkans, Middle East and Eurasia	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.33	0.33	0.34
Modern (<i>çağdaş</i>) ^d	0.14	0.00	0.28	0.83	0.25	1.28
International agreements	0.14	0.00	0.00	2.17	0.92	1.41
Globalization	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.66	0.33	0.54

Notes: ^aThe term welfare is also in the name of the RP and therefore represents a symbolic reference to continuity for parties founded after the RP's abolition;

^bDepending on the context, the term *milli* (National), which is in the name of National Outlook (Milli Görüş) movement, may imply association with the movement; ^cThe emphasis on minority rights as opposed to the will of the majority is a distinguishing feature of liberal democracy, and deficits of ethnic and religious minority rights (*azınlık hakları*) constitute a major problem Turkish democratization needs to address; ^dThe term *çağdaş* is often used by Turkish secular modernizers to denote modernization/Westernization, and was shunned by many Islamists who aspired to authentic models of modernization. MG, Milli Görüş

(National Outlook). Important changes are marked in bold.

Table 3. Positive evaluations of electoral and liberal democracy in the religious press and in the MG and non-MG religious press.

	1996–1999		2001–2004	
Electoral democracy (religious press combined)	65%		71% ↑	
Liberal democracy (religious press combined)	69%		76% ↑	
	1996–1999 (positive views)	2001–2004 (positive views)	1996–1999 (negative views)	2001–2004 (negative views)
Electoral democracy (MG)	64%	57% ↓	11%	16% ↑
Liberal democracy (MG)	62%	62% →	17%	15% ↓
Electoral democracy (non-MG)	66%	81% ↑	9%	3% ↓
Liberal democracy (non-MG)	76%	87% ↑	7%	3% ↓

Table 4. Changing image of the West.

		1996–1998	1999–2002	2003–2004
Religious newspapers	Positive	10% (42)	16% (69)	12% (45)
	Negative	72% (314)	55% (240)	60% (230)
	Neutral	19% (82)	29% (125)	28% (106)

Table 5. The image of the EU.

		1996–1998	2000–2002	2003–2004
Religious newspapers	Positive	14% (24)	45% (274)	38% (235)
	Negative	57% (98)	30% (180)	36% (225)
	Neutral	29% (49)	25% (154)	25% (157)
Secular newspapers	Positive	13% (30)	26% (170)	19% (77)
	Negative	42% (99)	40% (260)	45% (186)
	Neutral	45% (105)	34% (219)	36% (150)

to reflect a more liberal formulation of democracy. The findings also reflect divergence from the MG tradition. In *Milli Gazete*, which is linked with the MG movement, support for electoral and liberal democracy fell and remained the same, in respective order. By contrast, support for both types of democracy increased in the non-MG newspapers.⁵⁹ With these changes, the overall evaluation of democracy in the non-MG press converged on that in the secular press.⁶⁰ Figures not shown here indicate that support for democracy remained stable and slightly higher in the secular press.

Table 4 summarizes that the Muslim-conservative elites' image of the West improved drastically. The years 2003–2004 are treated separately as the war in Iraq, which the Turkish public predominantly saw as an unjust occupation of a Muslim country, had a negative impact on the coverage of the West.

Table 5 summarizes that the EU became a more frequently discussed subject (receiving three times as many references) with a considerably more positive coverage. In fact, it became more positive than in the secular press, which is striking considering that secular elites had previously been the frontrunners of Turkey's EU ambitions.

2002–2007: moderate religious government but unsustainable democratization with secular de-moderation and a semi-democratic centre

The period 2002–2007 witnessed major democratic reforms in addition to rapid economic recovery. The moderate Islamist AKP government, which now called itself “conservative-democratic”, gave its priority to the “twin objectives” of democratization and EU membership.⁶¹ Major constitutional amendments

expanded the formal civil and political rights and freedoms and civilian authority over the military.⁶² In 2005, Turkey was rewarded for its reforms with the start of the EU accession negotiations.

Notably, the reforms were legislated with cooperation across ideological lines. Unfortunately for democratization, this cooperation was not enabled by robust democratic institutions. While moderate secular actors cooperated with the AKP, others became radicalized and more supportive of military praetorianism against the Islamists.⁶³ Allegedly, some military commanders planned a coup against the government but did not go ahead with it. But hardliner-secular fears were temporarily kept at bay by the EU anchor and the authoritarian features of the semi-democratic centre. By using its legal authority to its utmost limit, President Sezer – a staunchly secularist former judge – vetoed the government’s religious-conservative appointments and laws. The military and the EU pronounced strong warnings whenever the government attempted to pursue a religious-conservative agenda such as a short-lived draft law criminalizing adultery in 2004. Simultaneously, the AKP associated itself with the centre’s international component, the EU, to defend itself against the military.

But democratization was unsustainable because sooner or later it would have to dismantle the military-bureaucratic tutelage which contained secularist fears. Military-bureaucratic tutelage was also weakening the incentives for the secular political parties to renew themselves. The latter suffered from internal fissures, corruption, discursive-ideological inertia and AKP-scepticism.⁶⁴ The CHP reversed its earlier attempts to moderate, adopting instead a more radical-secularist orientation to confront the AKP.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, the AKP was gradually consolidating its power through its economic performance and bureaucratic recruitments.

In 2007, a showdown occurred between the AKP and the secularist segments of the social and political centre led by the military, over the AKP’s election of one of its principal founders, Abdullah Gül, to presidency. Against the backdrop of a military ultimatum, which the CHP did not condemn, mass secularist rallies protested against the government.⁶⁶ But the secular protesters were at odds with the international component of the centre, notably the EU and the USA. They also lacked convincing arguments to oppose Gül’s presidency and were unprepared to challenge the AKP in areas such as economic policy, which the voters cared about. The AKP did not bow down, and Gül was elected and the AKP won the subsequent parliamentary elections with ease. This tipped the balance of power between the party and the secularist components of the centre, notably the military, in favour of the former.⁶⁷

2008–2012: religious de-moderation and the reproduction of the semi-democratic centre

In 2009, the Constitutional Court convicted the AKP of “having become a centre of anti-secularism” but ruled not to ban the party. At this time, the AKP was able to consolidate its power within the political centre, by winning a crucial referendum

in 2010 and national elections in 2011. But the party failed to enlist the cooperation of its secular rivals to build a new and more democratic centre, for example by writing a new constitution and continuing the democratic reforms made in the 2002–2007 period.

Theoretically, the AKP had sufficient power to construct a democratic centre unilaterally. In 2011, it got almost half of the votes cast and became the first party in the country's history to win three consecutive national elections with increasing support each time. It also seemed to have effectively brought the military under control. But, in addition to the weakness of the opposition parties that fuelled the AKP's self-confidence and authoritarianism, two factors seem to have diverted the party from focusing on constructing a truly democratic centre. First, the external support for democracy waned with the economic crisis in Western democracies, while Turkey's EU membership prospects did not clearly progress.⁶⁸ In addition, it became clear that the religious elite were not ideationally prepared to address the policy challenges of democratization in specific areas such as social pluralism, ethnic pluralism and freedom of expression.⁶⁹

Despite bold but short-lived attempts such as a "democratic opening" to resolve the long-festered Kurdish question democratically,⁷⁰ the pro-EU and pro-liberal democratic zeal of the AKP gave way to an increasingly nationalist, majoritarian and social-conservative rhetoric and practice. The use of religious discourse became more frequent. Prime Minister Erdoğan announced that birth control was a conspiracy to weaken Turkey, abortion amounts to murder, and he would like to cultivate more religious new generations. A revolutionary education bill overhauled the primary and secondary school system, allowing for more religious education.⁷¹ There were no plans to make *laiklik* more democratic or separationist, for example by dismantling or decentralizing the Diyanet. Rather than advocating a clearer separation of religion and state, the government appeared intent to use state-controlled secularism for its own goals. Between 2007 and 2010, press freedom declined dramatically.⁷²

In 2010, a new and more moderate leadership took over the CHP with the motto "new CHP". The moderates wanted to transform the party's defensive nationalist and secularist orientation into a more social democratic and proactive orientation focused on promoting economic development, welfare state and democracy. As of the end of 2011, however, these efforts did not appear to have been very successful.

Conclusions

All this is not to say that moderation cannot contribute to democratization without a democratic centre. It may do, but the main challenge of democratization is not moderation per se. It is the construction of a new centre, which requires actors to transcend, not embrace the existing centre. In the presence of a mainly democratic centre the main challenge is to secure better inclusion of underprivileged groups in the democratic system. This may be achieved through the moderation

of privileged groups who dominate the system and of anti-systemic actors who demand rights and opportunities for disenfranchised groups. A good example would be democratization in the USA, especially before the civil rights movement. Arguably, the USA then already had a mainly liberal-democratic social and political mainstream, that is, centre, but the centre's norms were unfairly and unequally applied to different groups. Thus, democratization was still needed and depended on the inclusion of racial minorities who were socially excluded and politically disenfranchised in many ways.⁷³ The challenge was to make the reforms that were necessary to expand the rights, freedoms and opportunities that were already supported by the centre but were unequally available to racial minorities.

By comparison, in cases with mainly authoritarian or semi-democratic centres, the main challenge of democratization is first to construct a democratic centre. This requires actors to go beyond the existing centre. One can hypothesize that this may happen under two scenarios, hegemony, that is, under the leadership of a dominant political actor, and cooperation, that is, through collaboration between religious and secular actors. One could imagine, for example, that a hegemonic actor can build a more democratic centre on its own, if it has a well-developed democratic ideology or enjoys strong external support for democratization. Neither condition seems to be present in Turkey in late 2012. Despite significant ideational transformation, Islamists lack a categorically pluralist ideology and are (like secularists) selective democrats; while EU support for Turkey's membership has waned.⁷⁴ Alternatively, a democratic centre would need to be constructed through cooperation, based on "twin tolerations" between religious and secular actors.⁷⁵

While Turkey is a case with a semi-democratic centre, the emerging post-Arab Spring polities would be examples of cases with authoritarian centres. In both cases, Islamist and secular actors tend to have comprehensive ideologies and distrust each other to differing degrees.⁷⁶ Thus, a key challenge of democratization in both cases is for secularist and Islamist actors to overcome their authoritarian ideologies and material and ideological conflicts, to the extent that they can thus form a winning coalition that would form the political basis and construct the institutions of democratic centres.

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Notes

1. Nasr, "The Rise of 'Muslim Democracy'"; Kinzer, "The Quiet Revolution."
2. Tezcür, *Muslim Reformers in Iran and Turkey*; Müftüler-Baç and Keyman, "Turkey under the AKP"; Turam, "Turkey under the AKP."
3. Schwedler, "Can Islamists Become Moderates?"

4. In choosing the term “centre,” I am undoubtedly inspired by seminal work on the idea of “centre” in Shils, “Centre and Periphery”; and Mardin, “Centre-periphery Relations.” However, I develop and work with an original conceptualization of my own throughout the article.
5. Kalyvas, “Unsecular Politics and Religious Mobilization”; Wickham, “The Path to Moderation”; Schwedler, *Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen*; Browsers, *Political Ideology in the Arab World*; Clark, “The Conditions of Islamist Moderation.”
6. Bermeo, “Myths of Moderation”; Haynes, “Religion and Democratization”; Künkler and Leininger, “The Multi-faceted Role of Religious Actors in Democratization Processes”; Tezcür, *Muslim Reformers in Iran and Turkey*.
7. Among others, Karakaya and Yildirim, “Islamist Moderation in Perspective.”
8. Schwedler, *Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen*; Browsers, *Political Ideology in the Arab World*.
9. Güllalp, “Political Islam in Turkey”; Öniş, “The Political Economy of Islamic Resurgence in Turkey”; Tuğal, *Passive Revolution*; Gümüüşçü, “Class, Status, and Party.”
10. Çavdar, “Islamist New Thinking in Turkey”; Hale and Özbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey*.
11. Angrist, “Party Systems and Regime Formation in the Modern Middle East”; Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu, *Turkish Democracy Today*.
12. Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*; Turam, *Between Islam and the State*.
13. Cizre, “Introduction.”
14. Cizre Sakallıoğlu, “Parameters and Strategies of Islam-State Interaction in Republican Turkey”; Heper, “Islam and Democracy in Turkey”; Tepe, “Moderation of Religious Parties.”
15. Mecham, “From the Ashes of Virtue, a Promise of Light”; Somer, “Moderate Islam and Secularist Opposition in Turkey”; Tepe, “Moderation of Religious Parties.”
16. Somer, “Moderate Islam and Secularist Opposition in Turkey”; Turam, *Between Islam and the State*.
17. For valuable exceptions, see Tepe, “Turkey’s AKP”; Tezcür, *Muslim Reformers in Iran and Turkey*.
18. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*; Tibi, “Why They Can’t Be Democratic.”
19. Kalyvas, “Unsecular Politics and Religious Mobilization”; Kurzman and Naqvi, “Do Muslims Vote Islamic?”
20. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*.
21. Browsers, *Political Ideology in the Arab World*.
22. Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*.
23. Casanova, “Civil Society and Religion”; Schwedler, *Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen*.
24. Schwedler, “Can Islamists Become Moderates?”
25. See Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, for a conceptualization of “political society.”
26. Although less likely, political agency may still enable moderating actors to develop pluralistic positions.
27. Secular-nationalists blamed Western powers for the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire but embraced political and cultural westernization. Potential alliances were also limited.
28. Kayalı, “The Struggle for Independence”; Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity*.
29. Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*; Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity*; Hale and Özbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey*; Mardin, “Centre-periphery Relations.”

30. Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies toward Religion*.
31. Kurzman, *Modernist Islam, 1840–1940*; Cizre Sakallıoğlu, “Parameters and Strategies of Islam-State Interaction in Republican Turkey.”
32. Göle, “Secularism and Islamism in Turkey.”
33. Cizre Sakallıoğlu, “Parameters and Strategies of Islam-State Interaction in Republican Turkey”, 235; Hale and Özbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey*.
34. Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity*.
35. Piscatori, *Islam in a World of Nation-states*; Browsers, *Political Ideology in the Arab World*.
36. Angrist, “Party Systems and Regime Formation in the Modern Middle East”; Altunışık, “The Turkish Model and Democratization in the Middle East”; Hale and Özbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey*.
37. Angrist, “Party Systems and Regime Formation in the Modern Middle East.”
38. Ciddi, *Kemalism in Turkish Politics*; Heper, *İsmet İnönü; Özbudun, Otoriter Rejimler, Seçimsel Demokrasiler ve Türkiye*.
39. Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies toward Religion*.
40. See, for example, Selcan Hacaoglu, “Fazil Say, Turkish Pianist, Charged With Insulting Islam,” *Huffington Post*, June 2, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/01/fazil-say-turkish-pianist_n_1562221.html.
41. Cizre Sakallıoğlu, “Parameters and Strategies of Islam-State Interaction in Republican Turkey,” 235; Tepe, “Moderation of Religious Parties.”
42. Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*.
43. Soydan, *Türkiye'nin Refah Gerçeği*, 24.
44. *Ibid.*; Şen, *AKP Milli Görüşçü mü?*
45. However, it should be noted that political Islamist parties remained organically separated from, yet sensitive to, the support of the Sufi communities.
46. Soydan, *Türkiye'nin Refah Gerçeği*; Şen, *AKP Milli Görüşçü mü?*
47. Kurzman, *Modernist Islam, 1840–1940*.
48. Ciddi, *Kemalism in Turkish Politics*.
49. Gümüşçü, “Class, Status, and Party”; Öniş, “The Political Economy of Islamic Resurgence in Turkey.”
50. Despite the relative rise of religious-conservatism since the 1980s, the median voter could be considered moderate as only a minority of Turkish voters supported Sharia-rule. See Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu, *Turkish Democracy Today*.
51. Tuğal, *Passive Revolution*, 44.
52. Among others, Öniş, “The Political Economy of Islamic Resurgence in Turkey”; Gülalp, “Political Islam in Turkey.”
53. Hale and Özbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey*.
54. *Ibid.*, 7.
55. Dağı, “Transformation of Islamic Political Identity in Turkey.”
56. Ciddi, *Kemalism in Turkish Politics*.
57. While the full official name of the party is Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party), the acronym for which would be AKP, the party also calls itself “AK Parti.” <http://www.akparti.org.tr/>
58. Somer, “Does It Take Democrats to Democratize?” The research examined the discussions among Muslim-conservative and secular intelligentsia through a systematic content analysis of three religious-conservative and two secular newspapers, by covering more than 40,000 articles.
59. *Yeni Şafak* and *Zaman*.
60. Somer, “Does It Take Democrats to Democratize?”
61. Hale and Özbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey*, 55.

62. Müftüler-Baç, "Turkey's Political Reforms and the Impact of the European Union"; Hale and Özbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey*, 55–62.
63. Somer, "Does It Take Democrats to Democratize?"
64. Öniş, "Conservative Globalism at the Crossroads"; Ciddi, *Kemalism in Turkish Politics*.
65. Ciddi, *Kemalism in Turkish Politics*.
66. Somer, "Moderate Islam and Secularist Opposition in Turkey"; Ulagay, *AKP Gerçeği ve Laik Darbe Fiyaskosu*.
67. Somer, "Moderate Islam and Secularist Opposition in Turkey."
68. Müftüler-Baç and Keyman, "Turkey under the AKP"; Turam, "Turkey under the AKP."
69. Somer, "Does It Take Democrats to Democratize?"; Tezcür, *Muslim Reformers in Iran and Turkey*.
70. Somer and Liaras, "Turkey's New Kurdish Opening."
71. Andrew Finkel, "What's 4 + 4 + 4?" *New York Times*, March 23, 2012.
72. Reporters without Borders, *Press Freedom Index*.
73. King et al., *Democratization in America*.
74. Müftüler-Baç, "Turkey's Political Reforms and the Impact of the European Union"; Gürses, "Islamists, Democracy and Turkey"; Somer, "Does It Take Democrats to Democratize?"; Tezcür, *Muslim Reformers in Iran and Turkey*.
75. Stepan, "Religion, Democracy, and the 'Twin Tolerations.'"
76. Cavatorta, "'Divided They Stand, Divided They Fail'"; Volpi, "Pseudo-democracy in the Muslim World."

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