

A Foreign Policy of Religious Freedom: Theoretical and Evidentiary Foundations

Daniel Philpott

Hopes for an American foreign policy of religious freedom have not fared well. Human rights easily become subordinated to larger political goals. Just as the struggle against Soviet communism was said to justify alliances with dictators in South Korea, the Philippines, and Zaire during the Cold War, so too, the imperative of fighting terrorism in Pakistan, Central Asia, and across the Arab world has muffled the cause that the U.S. Congress elevated in October 1998 when it passed the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA).

But must human rights and security always be competitors? Might religious freedom, and more broadly democratic regimes based on religious freedom, turn out to be not a goal that competes with and usually loses out to fighting against terrorism, but instead an integral strategy in that very struggle? This is the proposal of Thomas Farr, former Director of the Office of International Religious Freedom at the U.S. State Department, in his new book, *World of Faith and Freedom*.¹ Since IRFA succeeded in institutionalizing religious freedom in the American foreign policy bureaucracy the policy has involved mostly exposing violator countries and improving the lot of the persecuted. But the U.S. ought to expand this policy, argues Farr, so as to seek not only the freedom of prisoners but also free regimes, ones where the state respects the religious belief and practice of all citizens and where religions themselves renounce standing control over public policy and respect minority

¹ Thomas Farr, *World of Faith and Freedom: Why International Religious Liberty is Vital to American National Security* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008).

religions – a form of reciprocal respect that political scientist Alfred Stepan has called “the twin tolerations.”² By integrating the participation of the religious in politics, democratic regimes make the religious less likely to take up the gun.

One of the chief obstacles to such a robust embrace of religious freedom is the pervasiveness among American foreign policy cadres of the secularization thesis, holding that religion is either politically irrelevant or else an irrational, violent, atavism. Farr cites several prominent analyses of U.S. foreign policy in the Islamic world that either fail to take seriously the religious motivations of Muslims or else place hope only in Muslims who have taken on secular beliefs.³ No less than former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright also drew attention to this secularism in her 2006 book *The Mighty and the Almighty* and urged that a better understanding of religion could help officials know when it can be an ally of American foreign policy.

But the secularization thesis has proven wrong, at least insofar as religion has swelled in its social and political influence all over the world during the past generation.⁴ Religion’s return has taken on multiple valences, ranging from the destruction of New York skyscrapers to the demolition of authoritarian regimes and from the construction of democracy and peace settlements to the creation of bellicose theologies that fuel terrorism and civil wars. This ambivalence reveals both the potential of religion to be an asset to American foreign policy as well as the importance of understanding what forms of religion are likely to be such an

² Alfred Stepan, "The World's Religious Systems and Democracy: Crafting the "Twin Tolerations" In *Arguing Comparative Politics* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 213-253.

³ Farr, *World of Faith and Freedom: Why International Religious Liberty is Vital to American National Security*, 254

⁴ Cites.

asset. I join Farr in arguing that America's foreign policy goals of reducing terrorism and hostility to the Islamic world in general can be furthered by promoting democratic regimes characterized by religious freedom and the participation of religious actors. Here I wish to extend that argument by offering theoretical support and empirical evidence for some of its components: that authoritarian regimes who suppress religious freedom often encourage terrorism; that democratic regimes who allow religious freedom tend to moderate it; that religious actors who were once undemocratic can over time become more democratic; and that the same actors can even help to bring about democratic regimes. The words "often," "tend to," and "can" are used deliberately. None of these relationships is exceptionless or universal. Some religious groups will remain violent and supportive only of deeply illiberal and undemocratic regimes, even in democratic settings. But with a framework for analyzing the behavior of religious actors, policymakers might better be able to identify which ones are likely to be agents of change.

A Framework For Analysis

Why do some religious organizations and their leaders take up violence, including terrorism? Why do some actively support democracy and even courageously advocate it under authoritarian regimes? Among the factors that show up in the marketplace of explanations are resentment, alienation, economic, political and demographic influences, national and ethnic identities, oppression under colonialism, competition with other religions, radical doctrines, ideology, and popular myths. What is striking is how commonly western

intellectuals – academics and the elite media – write of religious behavior as the byproduct of some force that is not religious at all: economic deprivation, the need for security or comfort, a backlash against being relegated to the downside of globalization, or one or another subrational drive. Such is the influence of secularization theory.

To be sure, almost all of these factors do in some way shape the politics of the religious. But as I have argued elsewhere, two factors in particular explain especially strongly why religious actors take on the form of politics that they do, peaceful or belligerent, democratic or authoritarian.⁵ They are ideas, which include political theology and other ideologies, and the degree of independence between religion and state. Each reflecting qualities that are intrinsic to the character of religious actors and their relationship to states, these two factors provide the conceptual building blocks for understanding the links between democracy, religious freedom, and terrorism.

Political theology is the set of ideas that a religious actor holds about what is legitimate political authority.⁶ Who possesses such authority? A king? A sultan? The people ruling through a constitution? To what degree and in what manner ought the state to promote faith? What does justice consist of? What is the right relationship between religious authorities and the state? What are the obligations of religious believers toward the political order? To say that political theology matters is to say that a religious actor's political stance is traceable, at

⁵ Citation.

⁶ In using the term political theology, I am aware that the term has a history of being used by diverse and prominent authors, among these Carl Schmitt, Johann Baptist Metz, and Francis Fiorenza. My own useage is quite different from any of these others. For an exploration of the concept, see Hent de Vries and Lawrence Eugene Sullivan, *Political Theologies : Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

least in part, to this set of ideas. Motivated by these notions, religious actors have undertaken to support, oppose, persuade, urge, protest, rebel against, and sometimes pay very little attention to political rulers. Religious actors arrive at their political theologies through reflection upon their religion's texts and traditions and its foundational claims about divine being(s), time, eternity, salvation, morality, and revelation. Contemporary circumstances, though, matter as well. Political theology links basic theological beliefs to political ideals in any particular context. It is the difference between Methodists and Mennonites in the United States and between Moktadr Al-Sadr and Ayatollah Sistani in Iraq.

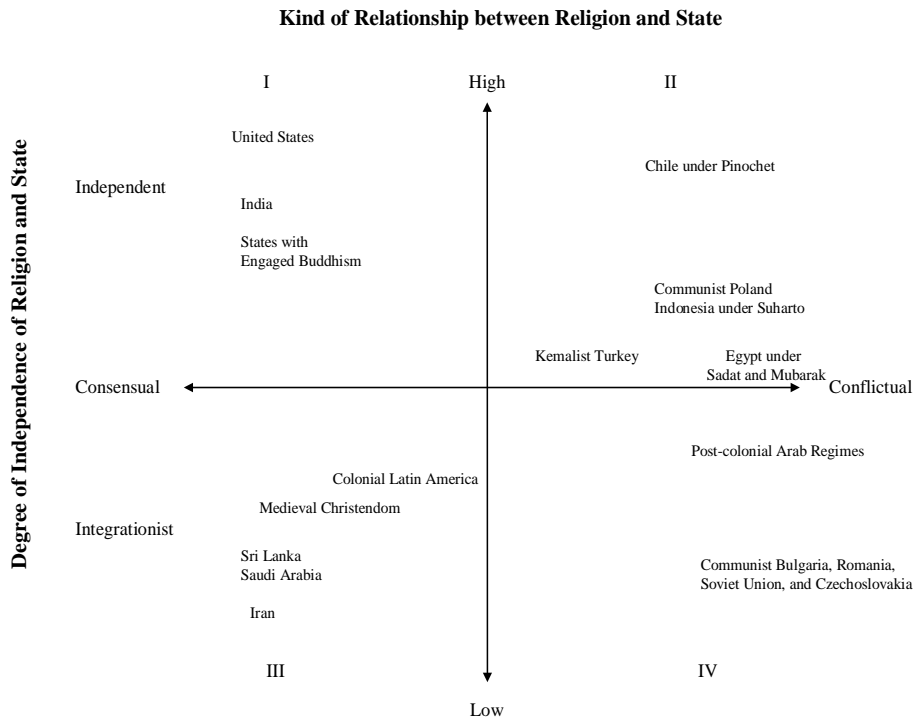
Political theology is not the only kind of idea that influences religious actors or their relationship to states. Other forms of ideology influence the behavior of states towards religion. Often these have been secular ones. One form of secularism is relatively friendly to religion, holding that it ought to be protected but not privileged in matters of governance. Another form holds that the state ought to limit and regulate religion sharply, and has been embodied in the French Revolution and in parties carrying out its ideals in Europe, Latin America, the Republic of Turkey that Kemal Ataturk founded in 1923, and in Turkey's many Arab nationalist imitators. An even stronger form of secularism seeks to eradicate religion or only to permit its frail shell, a form found in Communist regimes in the Soviet Union, Mao's China, Cuba, Romania, Bulgaria, and many other countries.

Aside from political theology and related ideas, the other major influence on religious actors is the differentiation between religious bodies and political institutions. Borrowed from sociologists, differentiation means the degree of

legal, constitutional separation between religion and state. It combines elements of what Americans call separation between church and state and religious freedom but also includes other elements like the degree of support for a religion from transnational co-religionists outside of a state's borders, a factor that can strengthen the autonomy of religious actors vis-à-vis the state.

Importantly, differentiation can vary not only in degree but also in kind: Is it consensual or conflictual? A consensual relationship is one that both religious actor and state regard as legitimate; each party is happy with the status quo. A conflictual relationship is one that at least one party wants to revamp; any consent it gives is either prudential and provisional or elicited by the other party's coercion. Both differentiation and integration can each be either consensual or conflictual, resulting in the matrix of four types depicted in the following figure.

Table: Relationships Between Religion and State



Quadrant I, the upper left hand corner of the diagram, can be thought of as “consensual differentiation.” Here, religion and state enjoy autonomy from each other and are mutually content with this autonomy. The quintessential occupant of this region is a liberal democratic constitution that institutionalizes religious freedom and disestablishment. This is the kind of arrangement for which a religious freedom policy aims. The twin tolerations are achieved and stable.

The upper right hand corner, Quadrant II, is the region of “conflictual differentiation.” Here can be found relationships between religion and state in which a regime, often a secular one, seeks to suppress religion, but in which the religious community resists and manages to preserve a sphere of autonomy, or

what George Weigel has called “moral extraterritoriality.”⁷ Examples include Christian Churches that remained alive through heroic struggles in Poland, Lithuania, and Chile and Islamic communities that survived in Turkey and Indonesia in the last century.

Where differentiation between religion and state is low, their relationship can be called “integrated.” In Quadrant III, the lower left hand box, the integrated relationship is consensual: the state and the dominant religious community each support the authority of the other. At times, they might also engage in rivalry, but always within the context of, and sometimes over the terms of, their integrated relationship. The struggles between Pope and Emperor during Europe’s High Middle Ages fit the description well. The relationship between the Catholic Church and the crowns of Spain and Portugal in colonial Latin America were also consensually integrated, though sometimes fractiously. Today, the relationship between Islamic authorities and the state in today’s Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Sudan is consensually integrated as well. Sometimes, as in these examples, states can practice a consensually integrated with one religious group while suppressing another religious group that is either a minority religion or a dissenting faction of the same religion. The government of Sudan, for instance, strongly supports traditional Islam but represses Christians in the southern part of the country.

The lower right hand box represents a “conflictually integrated” relationship” in which religious groups are effectively suppressed, usually by a regime with a secularist political theology. Religious bodies under such states

⁷ Citation.

may once have put up resistance, as did some heroic martyrs in the Orthodox Church in the early days of the Soviet Union (1920s) or in the first years of the Cold War in Romania and Bulgaria (late 1940s), but there dissent was hastily quelled. Here, the limited freedom that such religious actors enjoy is realized only at the sufferance of the regime. States have effectively “integrated” religion into their own authority. The relationship between religion and state in most Communist regimes fits this description, including the treatment of “underground churches” at the hands of the contemporary government of China. The treatment of traditionalist Muslims by some Arab states belongs here as well: Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, the Shah’s Iran, and Nasser’s Egypt.

The relationship between religion and state – differentiated or integrated, consensually or conflictually – along with the political theology of religious actors and the ideas that govern a state’s treatment of religion together explain much about the political circumstances that encourage religious violence as well as the relationship between violence, democracy, and religious freedom.

How Authoritarian Regimes Encourage Terrorism

In 2005, there were 262 terrorist organizations in the world, according to the Terrorist Knowledge Base. By my calculations, 94, or 36% of these, are identifiably religious. Of the religious ones, 91% carried a political theology that can be called Radical Islamic Revivalist. It is these groups that have carried out the preponderance of attacks on the U.S.: on the World Trade Center in 1993, on the U.S.S. Cole, on the U.S. embassy in Nairobi, on U.S. forces in Iraq, and of course, September 11th.

The political theology of these groups merits the name Radical Islamic Revivalist because it is rooted in the belief that Islamic civilization has descended into *jahiliyya*, a state of barbaric darkness, both through its internal corruption and through domination at the hands of outsiders. Their solution is a revived moral commitment to *sharia*, the way to God, in all areas of life, including politics. Such was the claim of revivalism's founding fathers: Hassan Al Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Maulana Maududi, founder of Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami, and Egypt's Sayyid Qutb. One might think that groups with such a pedigree would be unalterably hostile to democracy. But not necessarily. Let us take a closer look at why revivalists decide to turn against the system rather than work within it.

Most majority Muslim countries in the world today are governed undemocratically. Only three out of 47 – Mali, Senegal, and Indonesia – are ranked “free” by Freedom House. About a quarter have democratic elections, though most in this group, like Pakistan, lack democratic freedoms in other respects. Islamic authoritarian regimes take two forms. The Iranian revolution is the prototype for one version, of which Saudi Arabia and Sudan are also examples. Here, governments are motivated by Islam beliefs or close alliances with Islamist groups to carry out repressive policies towards political and religious dissenters and members of other faiths. Towards their favored view of Islam, they practice a “consensually integrated” relationship; toward dissenters and religious minorities, they adopt a “conflictually integrated” stance.

But if authoritarianism prevails in Islam, Islam is not always the cause of authoritarianism. In fact, far more authoritarian regimes in the Muslim world

stem from the ideals of the French Revolution than from those of the Iranian Revolution. These ideals include social equality, nationalism, economic modernization, and, not least, secularism. Unlike the secularism of the U.S. Constitution, which provides for religious freedom from government control, this form of secularism involves strong government control. In a common pattern, the government supports and officially establishes but also co-opts and sharply regulates a moderate form of Islam that is compatible with its ruling purposes – consensual integration – all the while suppressing and marginalizing more conservative and traditional forms of Islam, which here become the objects of conflictual integration.

Prototypical of this form of authoritarianism was the Republic of Turkey, founded in 1924 by Kemal Ataturk, whose determination to modernize Turkey led him to regulate sharply the speech, practice, leadership, and even dress of Turkey's Muslims. Today, the Turkish Government controls the leadership and activities of mosques, even composing a weekly Friday prayer to be read out there, prevents Sufi and Alevi Muslims from constructing places of worship, controls the teaching of religion in schools and universities, curtails the rights of non-Muslim minorities to associate and to construct worship spaces, and goes so far as to oversee the redaction of the Hadith, some of Islam's holiest texts. This was the pattern in Egypt, too. After he took over in 1952, President Gamal Abdel Nasser banned all independent political groups in 1954; those that survived were forced underground. Though Nasser himself was a devout Muslim, his political theology was entirely secular. The same sort of denial of religious freedom out of secularist ideals of modernization and social equality took place in Algeria,

Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, Jordan, Qatar, Yemen, Iran under the Shah, Iraq under Saddam Hussein, elsewhere in Middle East, and in Indonesia under the dictatorship of Suharto up until 1998.

But this subordination and sanitization of religion – integrationism – proved to be just the atmosphere that radicalized revivalists and led them to violence and terrorism. Denied the role in politics that democracy can provide, not only were they marginalized but they were never subjected to any of democracy’s moderating effects – the practice of arguing and being argued against, the business of forming coalitions and brokering deals, and the open space in which their own theology can be debated and potentially revised. In Egypt, it was just this sort of atmosphere in which a faction of the Muslim Brotherhood turned to violence, even attempting to assassinate Nasser in 1954. Authoritarianism incubated terrorism in the rest of the Arab Muslim world as well. Consider Algeria, for instance. There, three decades of rule under a military regime promoting modernization and secularism produced neither. Amidst economic crisis, a popular revivalist group, the Islamic Salvation Front, won a first round of elections in 1991, only to see the regime cancel a second round. The result was between 150,000 and 200,000 deaths in over 11 years of civil war.

An aggregate look at contemporary terrorist groups reveals the influence of authoritarianism upon them. To be sure, the evidence is not without ambiguity. Three studies in the last fifteen years show that terrorists strike more often in democracies and free countries than in unfree countries.⁸ But then a

⁸ Pape (2003), for instance, finds that suicide terrorist attacks are more likely to be directed against democracies than against authoritarian regimes, and that since 1980 all such campaigns

strong correlation between authoritarianism and the risk of terrorism is reported by economist Albert Abadie of Harvard University in his 2004 study. Even more relevant to the argument here is where terrorists originate, the focus of a Freedom House study showing that 70% come from regimes that are considered “not free” while only 8% come from “free” countries.

None of these findings, though, specifically focuses on religious terrorists, who, again, make up 36% of all terrorists. Given their religious ends, one might expect authoritarian regimes, especially integrationist ones, to rouse them especially strongly. An analysis of the Terrorism Knowledge Base shows a positive relationship between authoritarianism and religious terrorism with respect to the site of operation: of 95 current religious terrorist groups, only 31, or 32%, operate in countries that Freedom House categorizes as “Free.”, whereas 42, or 43%, operate in “Not Free” countries, and 20, or 21%, in “Partly Free” countries. Evidence that the countries where these groups operate are integrationist is also found in the International Religion Indexes of Brian Grim and Roger Finke. The “Government Regulation Index” of these countries, which measures government interference in religion on a scale from 0 to 10, averages out to 5.75, compared to an average of 3.07 among the total of 196 countries in the data set; their “Government Favoritism Index,” which measures direct

have been directed against democracies. His argument, however, is not that democratic regime structures breed terrorists, but that terrorists attack states whom they perceive as occupying their lands, which happen to be democracies. His sole focus on suicide terrorists also limits generalizations about terrorism and democracy from his argument. More straightforwardly, Weinberg and Eubank (1998) found that during 1994 and 1995, terrorism occurred more often in democracies than elsewhere. Gause (2005) corroborates the claim with a State Department Report showing that between 2000 and 2003, 269 major terrorist incidents took place in countries that Freedom House ranks as “free,” whereas 199 occurred in “partly free” countries and 138 in “not free” countries.

government support for religions, averages 6.92 for countries where terrorists operate, compared to 4.34 for the entire dataset.

Data showing where religious terrorists originate are unfortunately scarce. A form of evidence for the integrationist sources of religious terrorism is less direct and more subjective—the perceptions of religious terrorists themselves. Recall that 91% of them are Radical Islamic Revivalists. All revivalists believe that outsiders are attacking and eroding their faith (though they identify internal sources of decline, too). Even though not all of today's revivalist groups originated or operate in an oppressive setting, they commonly trace their parentage to intellectuals who perceived all of Islam in a state of defensive embattlement—Maududi, al-Banna, Qutb. In part, what revivalists want to defend are Muslim homelands. The Terrorist Knowledge Base shows that 32% of today's religious terrorist groups mix their religious ends with self-determination; 11% of them fight for the Palestinian cause. But revivalists also hold that oppressive governmental institutions prevent the realization of Islamic law and morality. They identify such institutions historically as colonial regimes imposed by the West and contemporarily as secular, nationalist, authoritarian Arab regimes and communist regimes—the strongest embodiments of integrationism. It is in response to what they perceive as attempts to marginalize them and their vision that revivalist terrorists wage their *jihad*.

Qualifications are in order. Structure is not everything. It is not inevitable that religious groups who are marginalized by integrated religion-state arrangements will turn to violence. Much also depends on their political theology. For instance, in Egypt, which follows the Arab secular nationalist

model in which the government allies with and permits a moderate form of Islam, traditional Islamists have adopted both “reformist” and “militant” responses, depending on the doctrines through which they translate the texts of the Quran and the Hadith into views of the political order. Still, both the aggregate data and several salient examples suggest that structure matters. Integrated settings tend to encourage radical political theologies to form and then to take a turn towards violence.

The Compatibility of Islam and Democracy

But if authoritarian settings that deny religious freedom beget violence and terrorism, this does not alone prove that revivalist or otherwise traditionally religious groups will participate in or be moderated by democratic institutions. Evidence is needed that such groups will respect the differentiated character of the regimes under which they live. Secular dictators, after all, like to justify their rule with the argument that they are keeping religious extremists at bay. Allowing Islamists to participate in democracy, they argue, will bring an end to democracy: one man, one vote, one time.

As argued above, democracy is still relatively rare in the Muslim world, especially if one means democracy that involves not only elections but the full set of freedoms set forth in the human rights covenants. But is Islam itself incompatible with to democracy? In fact, there is good evidence that seriously religious Muslims – movements, parties, and leaders who draw their political beliefs from Islamic scripture and tradition and are not substantially secularized

in their thinking, as Nasser was – are willing to participate in elections and rule of law when given the chance.

Political scientist Vali Nasr has traced what he calls “The Rise of `Muslim Democracy” between the early 1990s and 2005. In the Muslim-majority countries of Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Turkey, he shows, can be found parties with Islamic identities competing for votes, winning elections, and, perhaps most importantly, showing a willingness to stand for election a second time. These parties are generally more moderate than Islamists or revivalists who want to see a strong form of *sharia* as the basis of the state but are still committed to seeing Muslims values realized in the political order. In this sense, they resemble Christian Democratic parties in Europe and Latin America. Most of these parties have indeed defeated more strongly Islamist factions and parties at the polls – itself powerful evidence that the introduction of democratic competition to a country does not result in the end of democracy. Though at times these parties show Islamist tendencies, favoring the strict moral and religious laws that Islamists advocate, this is usually a matter of strategic electoral politics.⁹ In all of these countries, the onset of a differentiated institutional environment both allowed and encouraged Muslim parties to participate in politics and in fact favored those parties with a moderate but still substantively Islamic political theology.

Nasr observes that most of the democratic movements he documents exist in the non-Arab world. Political scientists Alfred Stepan and Graeme B.

⁹ {4066 Nasr, Vali 2005;}. P. 14. Open electoral competitions, he documents, have occurred in Bangladesh in 1991, 1996, and 2001, in Indonesia in 1999 and 2004, in Malaysia in 1995, 1999, and 2004, in Pakistan in 1990, 1993, and 1997, and in Turkey in 1995, 1999, and 2002.

Robertson pick up on the point and demonstrate that an important gap exists between democracy in the 31 non-Arab Muslim majority countries and the 16 Arab Muslim majority countries in the world. But a focus on the non-Arab countries indeed shows that democracy there is significant. The test of showing three or more consecutive years of moderately high political and electoral rights between 1972-1973 and 2001-2002 is passed by about a third of the non-Arab Muslim countries (11 or 12) but only one of the Arab countries (Lebanon).¹⁰ The more stringent test of five or more consecutive years is passed by 8 non-Arab Muslim countries but none at all in Arab world.¹¹ Then, Stepan and Robertson control for economic development, the strongest predictor of democracy, and show that non-Arab Muslims majority countries include seven countries who can be called “electoral overachievers,” meaning that they are significantly more democratic than their GDP per capita would alone predict, while the same cannot be said for any of the non-Arab Muslim countries. Focusing on the 38 poorest countries in the world, they show that virtually no difference exists between Muslim and non-Muslim countries in their level of democracy. Here, virtually the same percentage of the non-Arab Muslim world is an “electoral overachiever” as Christian and other countries (though here again, the Arab Muslim world is virtually without electoral overachievers).¹² Once Arab culture and economic development are controlled for, Stepan and Robertson show, Muslim democracy is significant if not dominant.

¹⁰ 11 out of 29 non-Arab Muslim majority countries pass the test using Polity IV data, while 12 out of 31 pass it using Freedom House data. See p. 32.

¹¹ The non-Arab case include Bangladesh, Djibouti, the Gambia, Malaysia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, and Turkey.

¹² Stepan and Robertson, pp. 32-36.

The argument is strengthened by a closer look at two Muslim parties, each a wing of a larger movement, that are more Islamist in their orientation than the parties on which Nasr focuses. That is, their political theology favors a state based on a strong and traditional version of *sharia* law. Each was in fact founded by one of the prominent revivalist intellectuals of the mid-twentieth century.

The first is Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, which might from its public reputation in the West seem implausible as anything but a threat to democracy. Is this not the same organization of which Hamas, a party that calls for the destruction of the Israeli state, is an offshoot and that itself advocates a *sharia* state that would subordinate women and make religious minorities second class citizens? This valence of the Brotherhood cannot be denied. But a closer, more careful look reveals a far more complex organization, one that, at least in Egypt, is by and large non-violent, committed to democratic engagement, characterized by a younger generation that is more liberal than its elders, and distinct from several other Islamic organizations in Egypt that have indeed chosen the path of terrorism and violent opposition. This relatively moderate stance indeed stems from the very theological beliefs of the Brotherhood, which call for a revival that begins with personal piety, is to be followed by the spread of Islam through persuasion and civil society structures, and that is expected to usher in a *sharia* state only after Islam has been widely planted in the minds and hearts of the population.

Under Nasr, during the 1950s and 1960s, the Brotherhood was largely suppressed as a public organization. Then, in the 1970s and 1980s, as the organization gained members among university students, the successive

governments of Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak allowed it to participate in civil society groups though continued to ban it as a political party. Responding to this opening, the Brotherhood vigorously gained control of a wide variety of civic organizations, including the lawyers and engineers associations. In 1992, sensing the group's power, Mubarak cracked down and placed many of its leaders in prison. But the organization continued to participate non-violently in whatever way it could, including fielding independent candidates for parliament, as it has in the last four elections. It is widely believed that if allowed to participate openly in politics, the Brotherhood would easily gain a majority of seats in the parliament.¹³

Egypt has been called a semi-open authoritarian regime – something in between a full democracy and a dictatorship that allows no participation. In this environment, the Muslim Brotherhood has participated wherever openings in the system have allowed it to. This is a case of “conflictual differentiation,” where a religious actor operates with significant independence, though always a precarious and threatened independence and nowhere near as freely as it would in the consensually differentiated setting of liberal democracy. Here, an organization with a political theology that inclines it towards participation can be an influence for democracy.

Another Islamist group that has proven willing to play the democratic game is Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), founded by Maulana Maududi in 1941 upon the ideals of Islamic revivalism and a *sharia* state. Throughout Pakistan's history, JI has been willing to participate in elections and remain a loyal

¹³ Cite Carrie Rosefsky Wickham.

opposition party after defeat. Indeed, in two cases when the Pakistani governments resorted to extra-constitutional measures, including rigged elections, in order to keep themselves in power, JI was the most important source of the protest and opposition that returned Pakistan to democracy. It has also consistently been the case that JI has had to moderate the harsher edges of its demands for *sharia* law in order to compete for votes and to participate in coalitions once elections have taken place. The fact that it has never polled nearly as many votes as the more moderate Muslim League has not dissuaded it from contesting elections.¹⁴

With respect to both the Muslim Brotherhood and JI, it may legitimately be asked whether, were they to gain power, even if they abided by the electoral provisions of democracy, they would uphold those dimensions of democracy that involve liberal rights, particularly freedoms for women and religious dissenters and minorities. The political theology that they have expressed and their practices with respect to their members leave room for doubt. In response, though, it may be asked whether such groups are more likely to become more moderate and liberal in a democratic environment where they must persuade, compete for votes, and make alliances or in an environment where they are repressed and sidelined. In both cases, it is through democratic processes that moderation has taken place.

Finally, there are at least a couple of prominent cases in which Islamic movements have been a motor of democratic change. They in fact followed a trajectory not unlike that of the Catholic Church in its own support for

¹⁴ Nasr 1995.

democratization. Political scientist Samuel P. Huntington argues that the third wave of democratization – which he dates from 1974 to 1989 – was a Catholic Wave: three-quarters of democratizing countries were predominantly Catholic in their populations. Behind this trend was a sea change in political theology, namely the official embrace of democracy and human rights, especially religious freedom, by the Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s. Through the unusually dense transnational ligatures created by the Church's hierarchy, this teaching spread quickly to national Catholic churches all over the world. In countries where the Church was already differentiated from the state, as it was conflictually in Poland, the new political theology helped to recast the Church's struggle as one of democratization and human rights. Other national churches, like the Spanish one, responded to the new teaching by unilaterally withdrawing from their consensual integrationism with an authoritarian state and then becoming an agent of democratization. Finally, in places like Hungary, Argentina, and Rwanda, the Church never in fact became a democratizing force – here, at least relative to other national churches, it failed to adopt the new political theology and remained quite integrated with the state.

Have such patterns been replicated in Islam? In Turkey – the very prototype of a statist regime – an Islamic movement exercised force for democracy. Its political theology springs from the modernist Islam of the Nurcu and Naksibendi movements, rooted in the urban middle class and business elite, infused with a Sufi spirituality, and committed to influencing society and politics as a civil society actor. Though long accompanied by a more integralist Islamist strain, this new, democratic, thinking has risen to dominate Turkish Islam,

embodied in a succession of political parties that have then pursued a differentiated politics in which they might participate democratically. But the Kemalist military has long made this differentiation conflictual through its regular interventions to suppress Islam, most recently in the soft coup of 1997 in which it overthrew a government in which the Welfare Party had become the first Islamic coalition partner in the history of the republic. In the more recent elections of 2002, though, a new Islamic party – the Justice and Development Party (AKP) – came to power, espousing loyalty to European Union standards of human rights and democracy and indeed advocating Turkish membership in the European Union. Turkey is still a ways from the consensual differentiation of liberal democracy; the Kemalist regime’s control of religion is still in place. At least for the moment, though, a democratically minded Islamic movement has strengthened Turkey’s democratic institutions.¹⁵ Here, ideas have evolved within, and come to challenge, integrated institutions.

The other movement, Indonesia’s Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) represents a tradition of what anthropologist Robert Hefner calls “civil Islam” – an institutional separation between religious and political authorities complemented by a doctrine that sanctions such a separation and a culture of religious pluralism – that is at least six centuries old.¹⁶ In the last generation, the NU’s political theology has evolved to embrace modern democracy, which then led it to promote more differentiated institutions. Empowered by an Islamic resurgence in the 1970s and 1980s, the NU came to join a coalition for democracy that was

¹⁵ Yavuz 2003.

¹⁶ Robert Hefner.

instrumental in overthrowing the dictatorship of Haji Mohamed Suharto, encouraging multiparty elections in 1999, and transforming Indonesia into the third Islamic state to be ranked “free” by Freedom House.

Implications for American Foreign Policy

The administration of U.S. President George W. Bush was not typically accused of being too secular. Yet even its foreign policy often seemed to reflect the conviction that religious movements, particularly Islamic ones, could not be a force for democracy unless they were to become secularized. Consider its policy towards Egypt, a country that for two and a half decades has lived under the authoritarian rule of President Hosni Mubarak, who currently keeps 20,000 prisoners of conscience in his jails. Though in his Second Inaugural Bush gave eloquent voice to America’s mission for liberty and even linked it to the cause of fighting terror – “[t]he best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world” – his administration was willing to compromise democracy where it seemed to risk empowering a traditionally Islamic religious actor. Rhetorically, the administration urged Egypt to progress towards democracy. “Our goal here is to encourage the Egyptian Government, within its own laws and hopefully within a process and a context that is ever more reforming, to engage with civil society, with the people of Egypt for elections that can be free and fair,” Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice remarked in a speech at America University in Cairo in June 2005. But the administration stopped short of demanding that the Egyptian government remove its ban on the electoral participation of Egypt’s largest opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood, which

it associated with terrorism. In the same 2005 address, Rice continued, “[b]ut we have not engaged the Muslim Brotherhood and we don’t – we won’t.” In essence, the administration accepted the analysis of President Mubarak himself: It’s either my authoritarianism or democratic elections that empower religious extremists.

If the foregoing analysis is correct, then a policy of greater pressure towards democratization and “constructive engagement” of the Muslim Brotherhood might well be a better course of action. Not a blank check: In thawing democratic environments the U.S. ought to monitor groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and be prepared to oppose and pressure them should they threaten to deny fundamental human rights. But the U.S. would also act with greater confidence that opening up space for the participation of religious parties can have a moderating effect on them as well as on more extreme groups who have chosen violence. Some religious parties and movements can even be a force for opening up authoritarian systems.

But it is certain kinds of religious actors that are most likely to play this role – ones whose political theology is likely to favor non-violent democratic engagement and ones who have enough independence to be efficacious even if their state is not yet democratic – that is, parties and movements in the zone of “conflictual differentiation” or in settings where democracy is just emerging. Identifying such actors in turn requires taking seriously their most distinctively religious features – their doctrines, their particular relationship with their state, and perhaps other features like their organizational structure and their size. But this sort of analysis requires further that makers of U.S. foreign policy get

religion. The secularization theory is outdated and stands in the way of an effective struggle against terrorism and for democracy.