

## **Islam and Democracy: A Tocquevillian Approach**

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### **A New History**

From the end of World War II to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, seemingly every political gesture, every tactical consideration, every political maneuver, every war was linked to a broader conflict between two ideologies that each sought to become the sole guiding light for human destiny. Whether it was Angola, Afghanistan or Vietnam, the need to preserve and propagate communism or capitalism became the underlying justification for the armed conflicts that would define international relations for much of the latter half of the twentieth century. The fall of the Soviet Union signaled an end to the half-century long preoccupation of academics, journalists, and policymakers with the struggle between capitalism and communism. While many would mark this event as a watershed moment for human history (and it undoubtedly was), some, like Francis Fukuyama, would be so bold as to claim that it would trigger the cessation of history's Hegelian swings and signal instead, the "end of history."

Nearly twenty years later, the aftermath of the "end of history" has launched the beginnings of an ostensibly new history, featuring a global struggle between what may broadly be defined as Islamic fundamentalism and liberal secular democratization. To say that the values of Islamic fundamentalism or Islamist doctrine and the values of secular liberalism are both competing in the same way that capitalism and communism competed would be an incorrect assessment of the status quo and a potentially dangerous way of viewing the problem. While the forces of communism and capitalism sought to win over the loyalty of people across the globe, regardless of their cultural or ethnic denominations, the threat that Islamic fundamentalism and secular liberalism pose to each other is more purely existential. Islamic fundamentalism cannot survive in societies that accommodate secular liberalism and secular liberal societies cannot accommodate the values espoused by Islamic fundamentalism. As Rubana Akhgar, a second-generation British citizen and wife of Anjem Choudary (leader of the radical Islamic group al-Muhajiroun whose final aim is for Britain to become an Islamic state), articulates, "I believe that if everyone lived a truly Islamic life the world would be a better place... I want to protect my children from this society and bring them up in a strict Islamic environment so that it becomes a complete way of life for them" (Duguid 2003). In providing her justification Mrs. Choudary seems to present a perspective that as radical and absolutist as it may be, does not significantly diverge from the fundamentalist traditions of other religions or faiths. In his book *Understanding*

*Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, the historian George Marsden writes, “An American fundamentalist is an evangelical who is militant in opposition to liberal theology in the churches or to changes in cultural values or mores, such as those associated with secular humanism. . . . Fundamentalists are not just religious conservatives, they are conservatives who are willing to take a stand and to fight.” Such a depiction highlights the most critical aspect of fundamentalism: the willingness of the fundamentalist to use violence or militancy in the service of his faith. For the fundamentalist, the set of beliefs or doctrine that he subscribes to is so inviolable and so absolute that even the use of violence or militancy to protect his beliefs or to keep society from accommodating behaviors that he believes are antithetical to those beliefs are justified. For Americans, this can conjure images of the so-called ‘Invisible Empire’, the Klu Klux Klan, which held considerable influence over the polity specifically because of its willingness to use violence. Certainly, this portrayal of fundamentalism does not seem to drastically differ from one’s conception of Islamic fundamentalism today either.

While there are still active fundamentalist organizations in other religions and faiths (for example, the RSS wing of the Bharatiya Janata Party in India or certain elements of the Likud party in Israel), none have manifested into the global threat to security and stability that Islamic fundamentalism has been able to pose or been as adversarial to democratization (Stepan 54). It would be naïve to claim that Islamic fundamentalism is a recent phenomenon or that the Islamic world historically had seldom clashed with Western Societies (for example, Crusades, Reconquista of Iberian Peninsula). Yet, it is hard to deny considering the global nature of the current armed struggle, that there have been few other situations in which the conflict between Islamic and Western civilization have held such seemingly significant ramifications for the future of humanity.

Perhaps the most important facet of the conflict is addressing the claims of Islamic fundamentalists that Islam is inherently antithetical to the values espoused by the West’s secular liberalism. While the current war against the West is being prosecuted by the most radical elements of Islamic society, it will continue to gain momentum and grow even more perilous if Muslims from the mainstream of Islamic society begin to believe that their faith cannot accommodate the values of the Western democracy. The notion that Islam is incompatible with democracy is held even among western academics. As the scholar Samuel P. Huntington boldly wrote, the West’s problem “is not Islamic Fundamentalism. It is Islam” (Huntington 70). As the conflict intensifies and the fate of entire peoples and nations hangs in the balance, it has become increasingly important that a remedy to the Islamic world’s seeming anathema to liberal democratization be clearly identified and quickly concocted. More importantly, it is critical that the West can show Islamic societies that Islam is compatible with liberal democracy.

While finding answers to the short-term political problems in the Islamic world are important, the long-term and more significant challenge before policymakers is how, as simplistic as it sounds, to “win hearts and minds” within Islamic societies. Many societies with other religious groups have been able to embrace Western institutions (for example, constitutional law, religious toleration, democratic governance) along with their own cultural institutions (religion, traditional practices), while societies with large Muslim populations have been facing considerably more difficulties in finding a working balance. The coexistence of Islamic ideals and liberal Western institutions within Muslim societies is essential to quelling the rising influence of Islamic fundamentalism. Is it possible? Can a democratic society accommodate Islamic values? Can an Islamic society accommodate democratic values? Or are the characteristics of both so antithetical to one another that the complete destruction of one institution is requisite? Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*<sup>1</sup>, arguably the most insightful account of democratic societies ever written, provides a framework of ideas and observations valuable to the evaluation of the preceding questions.

Tocqueville’s most direct attitudes regarding the relationship between Islam and democratic society certainly aren’t flattering toward or encouraging of any notions of a peaceful coexistence. In fact, they are harshly pessimistic in judging Islam’s prospects of being successfully integrated into democratic societies. However, it requires a more comprehensive analysis of his entire work, particularly his observations regarding the necessary role religion must play for the development of a successful democratic society, to help answer whether Islam is compatible with liberal democracy. By using Tocqueville’s discussion of the relationship between religion and democracy as a framework to assessing the question, this paper will evaluate if Islam is truly compatible with liberal democratic institutions.

## **Tocqueville and the Politics of Islam**

In a 1998 interview with CNN, former Iranian President Mohammed Khatami noted that Tocqueville through his discussion of the New England Puritans, “corroborated the Islamic belief that the significance of this civilization is in the fact that liberty found religion as a cradle for its growth and religion found protection of

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<sup>1</sup> *Democracy in America* was originally published in two volumes, the first in 1835 and the second in 1840. This paper used the 2000 edition translated by Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop and published by The University of Chicago Press. Chicago, Illinois.

liberty as its divine calling. In Islam, liberty and faith never clashed” (Pease 88). While Tocqueville would certainly agree that the unique fusion of religious spirit and pursuit of liberty was tantamount to the success of American democracy, he certainly would have disagreed that Islam was capable of producing a similar result.

While discussing the success of religion institutions in America, Tocqueville articulated why Islam could never be compatible with democratic institutions.

Muhammad professed to derive from Heaven, and he has inserted in the Koran, not only a body of religious doctrines, but political maxims, civil and criminal laws, and theories of science. The gospel, on the contrary, only speaks of the general relations of men to God and to each other - beyond which it inculcates and imposes no point of faith. This alone, besides a thousand other reasons, would suffice to prove that the former of these religions will never long predominate in a cultivated and democratic age, whilst the latter is destined to retain its sway at these as at all other periods. (Tocqueville 2000: 420)

The crux of Tocqueville’s rejection of Islam is based in the idea that any religion that involves itself highly in the political sphere of a democratic society is subject to eventual deterioration. In an authoritarian society, religious figures could assume political functions within their community or exert the power of religious institutions through political structures without jeopardizing the community’s adherence to religious doctrine. In a society where adherence to religious doctrine was often cemented by force or “terror”, a religious institution could afford to “risk its legitimate power” (Tocqueville 2000: 284). By safeguarding freedom of religion, democratic societies force religious institutions to become more accountable to its followers. Consequently, this forces religious institutions to gain influence and power by increasing its followers, as opposed to extending its political power. When religion begins “allying itself with a political power” in a democratic society, it is in danger of “increase[ing] its power over some and los[ing] the hope of reigning over all” (Tocqueville 2000: 284).

Tocqueville indicates that religious expression in America is not only more sincere but its presence is stronger because of the separation between politics and religion. While the possibility that a separation between church and state could breed an apathy regarding religious matters, Tocqueville’s experiences with the religiosity of Americans indicate that every individual is driven by “instincts [that] constantly drive his soul towards contemplation of another world, and it is religion that guides it there” (Tocqueville 2000: 284). Since religious belief is, not only, non-politicized but also a function of individual liberty and choice, it becomes even more fervent

than it would otherwise be in an authoritarian society. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli observes, through his discussion of ecclesiastic principalities, that it is difficult to undercut the authority of the government in a society where the polity's subservience to the state structure is "sustained by higher powers which the human mind cannot comprehend" (Machiavelli 16). This suggests that policymakers cannot hope to be successful by discrediting Islam or even demonstrating how the presence of Islam in the political structure is damaging to the quality of their lives. Rather, policymakers must demonstrate how the presence of Islam within a political structure is dangerous to Islam itself. Tocqueville's analysis of the eventual deterioration or weakened strength of Islam when it manifests through a political structure could serve as an important point in persuading devout Muslims of the value democratization can bring to Islam.

While former President Khatami emphasized the similarities between the New England Puritan and the fathers of the Iranian Revolution and their respective outlooks on religious doctrine as a provider for public guidance and social stability, his failure to acknowledge Tocqueville's call for a strict separation between church and state creates a dilemma. The seeming "fusion of military and spiritual authority" found in Islam where God, through Mohammed, outlines a set of laws that any good Islamic society is to follow further increases the notion that Islam is inextricably and dangerously linked to the political structure (Stepan 46). As Tocqueville would suggest, Islam seemingly plays a political and judicial role in Muslim societies that is as important as its religious or more accurately, its spiritual role (which seems to be Christianity's main or only duty in American society). While Tocqueville contributes the "principal cause of the decadence so visible today [during the 1840's] in the Muslim world" to the excessive reach of the immobile dogmatic involvement of Islam into the political sphere of society, it is important to note that his observations of Islam's role in politics were collected during the waning days of a corrupt and failing Ottoman regime (Tocqueville 2000: 102). To truly judge if Islam was intrinsically 'undemocratic', one would have to demonstrate that Islam's ability to suffuse the state structure was remarkably more pervasive than Protestantism's or Catholicism's ability to do the same. In other words, Islam would have to exhibit certain qualities that allowed its doctrine to be incorporated into a society's laws and maxims in a way that other religions would not be able to do. This question is the subject of our next discussion.

### **Puritanism in New England and Catholicism in America**

Tocqueville credits the success of America's democratic society to the efforts of what he viewed, as its most noble and enlightened group of colonists. The Puritanism doctrine that governed the lives of the early New England colonists did

not only serve as “a religious doctrine; it also blended at several points with the most absolute democratic and republican theories” (Tocqueville 2000: 32). The beginning of a “democratic and republican Christianity” singularly responsible for the “establishment of a republic” brought together “politics and religion” in a manner that even the former President of Iran admired (Tocqueville 2000: 275).

The reality of Puritanism and the role it played in New England, as Tocqueville himself demonstrates, often (especially initially) did not yield the clear-cut manifestation of republican and democratic ideals that Tocqueville’s rhetoric sometimes indicates. For example, the initial penal code established by the New England Puritans was “borrowed from the texts of Deuteronomy, Exodus, and Leviticus” (Tocqueville 2000: 38). This often led to the creation and implementation of law that we would associate closer to the Taliban’s regime in Afghanistan than America’s modern democracy. One law read, “If any man, shall have or worship any other God but the Lord God, he shall be put to death (Tocqueville 2000: 38).” A punishment that personified the severe lengths that Puritan law often traversed in order to adhere with Biblical legal codes was “a fine and reprimand” that was assessed to a “young woman who was accused of having pronounced some indiscreet words and of having allowed herself to be given a kiss” (Tocqueville 2000: 37). While these laws and the Puritan legal code would eventually evolve into a document as fine as the US Constitution, it is important to recognize that even Protestantism was capable of seeping into the ‘political maxim and legal codes’ that Tocqueville warned Islam was capable of. The susceptibility to “carry the legislation of a rude and half-civilized people into the heart of a society whose spirit was [is] enlightened and more mild” is possible of the people in nearly every religious denomination (Tocqueville 2000: 38). While Islamic legal codes have clearly failed to evolve over the years in the same manner legal codes in Judeo-Christian societies have, there does not seem to be any inherent differences between Islam and Christianity to suggest that would be more or less damaging to a political entity, if practiced to the letter of the law ascribed in the religious texts.

Tocqueville’s discussion of Catholicism is interesting to consider because it presents an example of a dogma and ritually based religious tradition that does not merely survive in a democratic society, but thrives. Tocqueville observes that while Catholics show “ardor and zeal for their beliefs,” they form the “most democratic and republican class” that existed in the United States (Tocqueville 2000: 286). The reasoning he provides could prove beneficial to the prospects of a widespread coexistence between Islam and democracy. Tocqueville notes that, “Among Catholics, religious society is composed of only two elements: the priest and the people. The priest alone is raised above the faithful; everything is equal below him (Tocqueville 2000: 276).” In a strong way, this relationship primes a natural tendency to value equality, helpful, if not necessary, for the democratization process. Islam

operates very similarly to Catholicism in the manner in which equality between all followers and consistent obedience from all devotees, regardless of position, is emphasized. An imam or sheik often functions in a very similar manner to a Catholic priest. Tocqueville suggests that Catholicism grew stronger in America because the priests no longer assumed a political role in the society. If similar efforts could be made to force Islamic clerics and religious leaders to cede political power, Islam may go through a period of expansion reflective of Catholicism's success in the United States.

The notion that Islam holds characteristics that intrinsically make it antithetical to democratization cannot be true if the same is not held true for Christianity and its relationship with democracy. While predominantly Christian or Christian-influenced societies, like the American society, were able to significantly reform and advance their legal systems between the times of the Puritans and the time of Tocqueville, it was only a relative progress in relation to the massive changes we have made since Tocqueville concerning morality. While Islam might still be near the beginning of a continuum towards evolving its legal and political institutions, like Catholicism, it is capable of evolving these institutions towards more western-oriented democratic ideals. As Leonard Binder, in his article "Exceptionalism and Authenticity: The Question of Islam and Democracy" notes:

In the light of modern liberal democratic thought, Islam is no more, nor any less democratic than Christianity or Judaism. All three monotheistic religions, if proposed as constitutional foundations of the state, and if understood as providing an ineluctable authority for the guidance of all significant human choice, are undemocratic or non-democratic. (Binder)

### **How Pervasive is Islam in Political Institutions Today?**

While addressing the pervasiveness of other religions in their own society's political institutions, it is important to consider whether Islam is as pervasive now as Tocqueville seemed to indicate it was in the 1840s. A large number of Islamic societies are still classified as non-democratic, the intensity of Islam, even in Islamic institutions have decreased. In most communities, "positive law has replaced *shari'a* (except with regard to matters of "personal status," and more specifically the status of women)" (Filali-Ansary 24). More importantly, there have been remarkable changes in the fundamental ways in which Islamic society organizes itself. "Modern institutions" (nation-states, modern bureaucracies, political parties, labor unions, corporations, associations, educational systems) have seeped into the infrastructure

of Muslim societies throughout the world, while “traditional institutions are, at best, relegated to symbolic roles” (Filali-Ansary 24).

A study designed to test Muslim attitudes toward democracy and the performance of Islamic regimes in meeting the electoral-procedural definition of democracy indicated that Muslim societies hold attitudes and have a record that demonstrates they hold and reflect pro-democracy tendencies in all but one critical area: “the treatment and status of women and girls” (Fish 2002: 24). In fact, many analysts view the treatment and status afforded women in Islamic societies as the single biggest harbinger to democratization in the Islamic World.

### **Hurdles for Islam?**

Perhaps the greatest barrier in the movement towards democratization in Islamic societies is the perception of democracy that has been engendered in many of these countries. The impression that “Religious zeal” would “be extinguished as freedom and enlightenment increase” is a view that Tocqueville fought hard against” (Tocqueville 2000: 282). In fact, Tocqueville makes a concerted effort to show that “in America, one sees one of the freest and most enlightened peoples in the world eagerly fulfill all the external duties of religion” (Tocqueville 2000: 282). This is an impression unfortunately that few have been successful in articulating to the majority of Muslims in Islamic societies.

One of the few reasons many devout Muslims develop an aversion toward democracy is because of the perceived interchangeability of the terms ‘secular’ and ‘atheist.’ In part, this was initiated when Jamal-Eddin Al-Afghani, a renowned 19<sup>th</sup> century Muslim scholar, used the term *Dabrijin* to refer to secularists, which in its Qur’anic origin, had been used to describe atheists” (Filali-Ansary 24). The perception that secularization worked against God is perhaps one of the strongest instigators of Islamic society’s aversion towards democratization.

Democracy and its accompanying liberal ideals are often highly distorted to suggest irresponsibility, burgeoning materialism, and selfishness. The biggest challenge for policy-makers is to convince Muslims that the introduction of liberty or secularism in a society will not undermine social responsibility or destroy the social infrastructure of Islamic society.

Tocqueville, quoting John Winthrop, a Puritan preacher, provides a response to the fear of a liberal, dysfunctional society by articulating the difference between a corrupt conception of liberty, designed to satisfy temporary pleasures and desires, and a loftier more noble concept of liberty, designed to uplift man.

“There is a liberty of corrupt nature, which is affected both by men and beasts, to do what they list; and this liberty is inconsistent with authority, impatient of all restraint, the grand enemy of truth and peace, and all the ordinances of God are bent against it. But there is a civil, a moral, a federal liberty, which is the proper end and the object of authority; it is a liberty for that only which is just and good; for this liberty you are to stand with the hazard of your very lives.” (Tocqueville 2000: 42)

To sell democratic ideals while reflecting tremendous respect for Islamic institutions requires addressing the sources of contention that need to be reconciled. While any religion is forced to make allowances or soften the intensity of its expression to accommodate a Western democratic institution, there are three major sources of disagreement between western democracy and Islamic doctrine: the association between democracy and materialism, the separation of church and state, and (as mentioned before) the status and treatment of women.

The profusion of materialism through American society is a key criticism made by many Muslims, and by association, democratic institutions in general. Although there may be a widespread increase in material ambitions, as Tocqueville notes as common in a democratic regime, the “fatal circle into which democratic nations are propelled” forces them “to see the peril and restrain themselves” (Tocqueville 2000: 519). As Tocqueville makes his observations of the American democratic society, he recognizes he is collecting observations critical to the future of his own country’s path towards democracy. His analysis of materialism in a democratic society is a reminder that democratic society can very likely breed self-centered behavior. However, by subjecting one’s self to the ebb and flow of the open system, virtues are inculcated as opposed to being blindly followed.

One of Tocqueville’s greatest considerations for the creation of a successful democratic society was the steadying role that religion would have to play in serving as an irreplaceable social salve through a society’s development. When the religious institutions become politically active, however, these institutions along with the society in which they inhabit break down. In the documentary regarding the development of Afghanistan’s Constitution, *Democracy: Afghan Style*, one of the Muhajeddein delegates questions, “Why do we need a Constitution? Do we not have the Qu’ran?” (*Democracy Afghan Style*). This challenge to separate church from state may become the greatest barrier to success with democratization for Islamic societies. However, this is not to say that other religious communities did not face similar challenges in developing institutions with more liberal or democratic tendencies. It is important to remember that one would have to demonstrate that the Islam was uniquely incapable of accommodating secularism. Much of the argument for Islam’s inability to accommodate secularism arises from the notion

that a Muslim is more devoutly Muslim than a Christian is devoutly Christian. The infusion of Islam into the political structure in many countries with Muslim majorities has indirectly created a picture of the average Muslim as being more likely to be fundamentalist in his beliefs because religion plays a larger or more 'fundamental' role in his life than in the lives of a Hindu or Christian living in a secular democracy. While Islam may play a more fundamental role in the life of a Muslim in Iran, its role is a manifestation of political coercion as opposed to individual choice. There is nothing to suggest from merely the presence of devout Muslims in Islamic societies necessitates that these Muslims have a predilection (developed by an adherence to Islam) against secular democratic societies. In fact, there is data to suggest that the opposite is the case. In a World Value Survey, conducted between 1999 and 2002 among Arab men and women in societies highly influenced by Islam, the percentage of individuals who considered Islam to be "fairly good" to "very good" ranged from 93% in Algeria to 98% in Egypt (Tessler 2005: 84).

If anything, this data suggests that there seems to be a natural acceptance of democracy as the best working system, perhaps emanating from its ability to involve a greater proportion of the polity in public decisions, emphasizing that Muslims hold very similar views regarding the value of democracy to other cultural demographics. While Muslims may support democracy, the other argument commonly made is whether Muslims would support the liberal constitutional democracies that are endorsed in Western societies. Data from the World Values Survey previously mentioned indicated a surprising and mixed answer. The proportion of those who do *not* believe that only *shari'a* laws should be implemented ranges from 41 percent among Jordanians to 51 percent among Iraqis (Tessler 2005: 85). The data suggests that, on the whole, there seems to be significant and healthy disagreement regarding the role of Islam in shaping the laws of a democratic government. What the data does demonstrate is that there certainly isn't something innate about Islam that forces Muslims in Islam-influenced societies to not value secularism. In fact, there is plenty of data to suggest that there are significant populations within Western democracy that would like religion to play a larger role in guiding government policy.

Conservative stances on social issues are often promoted by the religious evangelical elements of Western society. Even in secular democracies, individuals often seek to elect leaders whose morality emanates from a religious text or religious authority. "The mistaken association between secularism and Christianity" is developed due to the fact that many secular Western democracies often hold majority Christian populations, but this is not to say that Christianity is innately more secular than other religions or faiths (AbuKhalil 2001: 115). At the very least, even within Islam, there is scriptural support for religious tolerance and secular

societies. In Sura (verse) 256 of the Koran, the sentence “There shall be no compulsion in Religion,” indicates that there is an Islamic backing for religious tolerance, or at the very least, a basic respect for another’s faith (The Holy Qu’ran 6). As minute as it may seem, even a single Sura can provide the necessary justification to shift the tone of Islamic society towards adopting a more secularist view of their societies.

While Fish’s analysis seems to suggest that much must be done to reform the status of women in the Muslim world if it can ever truly propel a major democratization movement, the good news is that there is nothing fundamental to Islam that advocates a lower status of women. Fortunately, Islam’s treatment of women is not an immutable or even strong-standing structure of Islamic society. In fact, the Koran provides no justification whatsoever for practices such as female genital mutilation and it condemns all infanticide as a heinous sin (Fish 2002: 26). Many of the more repressive practices that are found within Islamic law, including its treatment of women, are found in the *sha’ria* (a legal code written in the Middle Ages), as opposed to the Qu’ran. The initial purpose of *shari’a* wasn’t to codify a stringent set of absolute laws or rules. Rather, it was the result of a “medieval bargain” that was struck with authoritarian rulers in order to guarantee certain fixed rights (Filaly-Ansari 23). Unfortunately, this tenuous agreement perpetuated a seemingly inviolable set of rules and law that would come to dominate the remainder of Islam’s legal history. Since *Shar’ia*, however, is not fixed into the foundations of Islamic doctrine, it is an institution that is highly mutable. It will require an effort on the part of clerical leaders to bring the legal foundation of Islamic society back to its Qu’ranic roots.

Furthermore, while Fish’s analysis suggests that there are significant differences between the literacy rates of men and women in Muslim societies and those of western societies (specifically Catholic societies in the study) and also shows that Muslim societies are defined by population sex ratios which suggest high levels of female infanticide, there is no evidence to indicate that characteristics can be directly attributed to Islam. Fish observes, “Neither India nor China had rates of infanticide, neglect of girls’ health care and education, or prenatal sex selection markedly lower among the majority Hindus and Han Chinese than among the Muslim minorities” (Fish 2002: 33). While the poor treatment of women may be linked to a lack of education, poverty, or the vestiges of cultures that have historically been paternalistic, it certainly isn’t uniquely favorable to the presence of Islam. Additionally, the data suggests that even a country that struggles with maintaining a high status of its women, like India, can still develop into a legitimate Western-oriented democracy with respect for civil liberties. India, in particular, is an encouraging example of a country that struggles with discarding its archaic cultural

practices or paternalistic traditions (vestiges of ancient Hindu rites and rituals) that has still been able to make significant strides towards liberal democratization.

The hurdles Islam faces in its pursuit of democratization are not linked to fundamental differences between its doctrines and democratic ideals. In fact, the major obstacles are found in a set of legal documents that do not accurately reflect the foundation of Islam's cultural or political thought. While the effort will certainly not be easy, the recognition that there is nothing irreconcilable in Islam that is fundamentally antithetical to democratic ideal or Western institutions infers that the conflict is certainly, solvable.

### **Why Islam and Democracy Can Work**

"The high culture form of Islam," writes Ernest Gellner, "is endowed with a number of features--Unitarianism, a rule-ethic, individualism, scriptualism, puritanism, an egalitarian aversion to mediation and hierarchy, a fairly small load of magic--that are congruent, presumably, with requirements of modernity or modernization"(Filaly-Ansari 24). In fact, the early models for Islamic governance had, as even Tocqueville might have described, a highly republican flavor to it. Caliphs are chosen by members of the community rather than imposed by force, and where the behavior of rulers is clearly dedicated to serving the community instead of satisfying their personal ambitions (Filaly-Ansari 24). When considering that nearly half of all the world's Muslims, 435 million people, live in nations that are either fully or nearly democratic, there clearly is a precedent for Islamic reconciliation with democratic societies that Islamic societies must follow as a whole (Stepan 47).

With the emergence of Muslim democratic parties, increased attempts by monarchs in the Middle East to promote democratization, and the stabilization of a few democratic Islamic regimes (Turkey, Malaysia), there seems to be hope for a peaceful coexistence between Islam and Democracy. Islam can certainly not be discarded in the process towards democratization and many politicians have been able to develop a workable and pragmatic balance between the two to strengthen both Islam and democracy in their own societies. The rise of Muslim Democrats, like Christian Democrats or Jewish Democrats or Hindu Democrats, can draw upon the teachings of their faith on areas like "ethics, morality, the family, rights, social relations, and commerce" to build "political platforms designed to win regular democratic elections" (Nasr 2005: 13). By using the Qu'ran as a guide to influence the law as opposed to blindly accepting it as the law, Muslim Democrats seem to "offer the whole world its best hope for an effective bulwark against radical and violent Islamism"(Stepan 2004: A29). With victories in Bangladesh, Turkey, Pakistan and Malaysia (to cite a few examples), Muslim Democrats embody the constructive relationship that Islam and Democracy could share in the most pragmatic way.

It is important to remember that following the de-colonization of the Middle East during the 1950's, nearly all Muslim countries adopted some form of proto-democratic rule (El-Affendi 2003: 35). It is just as important to remember that much of the vehement Islamic fundamentalism that we see today is a reactionary movement to the stifling authoritarian regimes and dictatorships (often responsible for sweeping away the initially constructed proto-democratic regimes) that severely restricted freedom of religious expression. Many of these dictatorships, supported by Western regimes, violently oppressed religious movements within their own societies, spurring many to become even more fundamentalist in their beliefs and more extremist in their demonstration of those beliefs. A liberal democratic government that accommodated the free exchange of ideas and freedom of expression could serve to pacify the passionate and violent nature of many religiously driven movements. In many western countries, despite the vast presence of sincere and passionate religious expression, the freedom to practice and articulate one's beliefs keeps individuals from having to resort to extreme measures to sustain their beliefs. The rise of natural democratization in the Islamic world will see a corresponding decrease in the amount of religiously driven violence it experiences.

While some of today's Islamic regimes appear to be projecting an image that seems wholly contradictory to the ideals of liberal democracy the United States spouses, the progress the religion is making and its compatibility to democracy will allow it to surge another wave of democratization forward. When writing of the evolution of Puritan society, Tocqueville wrote:

Besides this penal legislation, so strongly imprinted with the narrow spirit of sect and all the religious passions that persecution had exalted and that still fermented in the depth of souls, was placed and in a way connected to them a body of political laws which, drafted two hundred years ago, still seems to anticipate from very far the spirit of freedom in our age (Tocqueville 2000: 32).

Two hundred years from now, let us hope that the same can be said of Islam.

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