Towards a Post-Islamist Secularism in the Muslim World

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Abstract

The political advancements of Muslim-majority secular-oriented states such as Indonesia and Turkey and ongoing popular uprisings in the Middle East have highlighted the need for a conceptualisation of the socio-political shifts and aspirations sweeping the Muslim World. These shifts are not exclusively secular or religious but represent an eclectic blurring of the secular and sacred. They also highlight a yearning for a political paradigm that accommodates the religious aspirations of Muslims whilst promoting democratic governance based on the principles of popular sovereignty and social justice.

Recent political developments in the Muslim World highlight a deep disillusionment with and resistance to authoritarian governance - both Islamic and secular. Various global surveys and qualitative studies on Muslim attitudes reveal widespread support for an eclectic form of secularism located within a post-Islamist framework of the passive secular democratic state. In keeping with these ideational shifts and political opportunity structures, many Islamist political parties appear to have pragmatically moderated their stance, particularly with regard to sharia and the Islamic state. This paper examines the global shift in Muslim aspirations in the secular-oriented Muslim-majority states of Turkey, Indonesia and Malaysia. In these states, mainstream Islamist parties and Muslim organisations have focused on good governance within the post-Islamist framework of the inclusive secular democratic state.
Post-Islamism: An Emerging Paradigm

What political form should the modern nation-state take? What political system most effectively promotes an economically vibrant and democratic polity that accommodates the spirit of religiosity? Can the Islamic state governed by comprehensive *sharia* (Islamic law) and notions of divine sovereignty genuinely accommodate democratic principles based on popular sovereignty? Can the secular democratic state accommodate the spirit of religiosity within the public sphere? These questions have animated the Muslim world for much of the twentieth and early decades of the twenty-first centuries and preoccupied the myriad political actors embroiled in the ongoing ‘Arab Spring’ sweeping the Middle East.

Upon the attainment of political independence, most post-colonial Muslim states were constituted as secular, quasi-secular states and states where Islam is not the official state religion. To date, only a minority of Muslims live in Islamic states governed by comprehensive sharia – all of which are authoritarian. Yet, the legitimacy of authoritarian secular and quasi-secular Muslim-majority states have been challenged by advocates of the Islamic sharia state ideal - even though Islamic states such as Iran and Saudi Arabia are confronted by chronic theological, socio-political, policy and economic contradictions and challenges. Indeed, shortly after the ousting of the authoritarian secular regime in Libya in September 2011, the rebel government surprised many of its domestic and international supporters by announcing that sharia would be a main source of legislation of the new state. This announcement generated considerable anxiety within the national and international communities as Libya’s rebel movement, the National Council, was believed to be led not by conservative Islamists but a mix of secular and moderate Islamists. This then begs the question: Are the well organised conservative Islamist parties and movements strategically positioned to exploit the ongoing political turbulence and eventually strengthen their political clout at the expense of the less organised secular-oriented movements in states such as Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen?

Recent global opinion surveys of the Muslim World consistently indicate that most Muslims aspire for a state that is democratic, inclusively secular and nuanced in its Islamic orientation – akin to the passive secularism of the European establishment church model which incorporates the sacred within the framework of the secular state.
Asef Bayat observes that this phenomenon, which he refers to as post-Islamism, has been fuelled by the failed Islamist experimentations of the 1980s and 1990s. Post-Islamism is neither anti-Islamic nor rigidly secular but as Bayat explains “represents an endeavour to fuse religiosity and rights, faith and freedom, Islam and liberty….emphasises rights instead of duties, plurality in place of a singular authoritative voice, historicity rather than fixed scriptures, and the future instead of the past”\(^1\). By upholding religion, highlighting citizenship rights and acknowledging ambiguity, multiplicity, inclusion and compromise, post-Islamism “aspires to a pious society within a democratic state”\(^2\). However, not all Islamist movements\(^3\) make this transition as some will oscillate between Islamism and post-Islamism.

Bayat maintains that many of the 2011 ‘Arab Spring’ uprisings are post-Islamist ‘refolutions’ (mixture of reformist and revolutionary zeal) that have transcended Islamist politics in terms of their rejection of both the authoritarian Islamic state and authoritarian secular state. These ‘refolutions’ are driven by reformist and revolutionary aspirations geared towards democratic change\(^4\). The secular-oriented protest movements driving the ‘Arab Spring’ thus represent a significant departure from many of the late twentieth century protest movements in the Muslim World - where the Islamic state ideal was a principal aspiration of many Islamists.

Conditioned by the failures of militant Islamists who attempted to dislodge the secular state through violent means, Islamist organisations such as the Muslim Brotherhood have increasingly adopted the electoral path and missionary approach in realising the goal of building a society rooted in Islamic values. Embedded within the structures of the political system, Islamist movements such as Gamaïyya Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadyya (controls 500 mosques and numerous schools and associations and Al Azhar (the main Islamic institution) were caught back-footed and did not initially support the ‘Arab Spring’ protest movement in 2011. Indeed, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood only joined the protest movement after pressure from younger members\(^5\). In Yemen and Syria, the Islamist presence in the protests movements appears limited while in Bahrain, the mainstream opposition has largely advocated secular demands such as an elected government, free press, the right to establish organisations and an end to religious discrimination.
Political Moderation and Oscillation
Islamist parties have only made significant electoral headway in a few ‘breakthrough elections’ – the first genuinely competitive electoral contests in a generation or more. They include the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria (1991) and the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) in Palestine (2006). Hamas’s electoral success in 2006, garnering 44% of the vote, was largely due to voter concerns about corruption and lack of security rather than with religiosity\(^6\). The World Values Survey, Gallop World Poll and Pew Survey findings noted above have been reaffirmed by Kurzman and Naqvi’s study of 89 electoral contests in the Muslim World over the last 40 years. Their study found that the electoral performance of Islamic parties has been less than impressive - median Islamic party performance hovers at around 15.5% of votes and 15% of seats. This suggests that the likelihood of Islamists winning in free and fair elections in a non-turbulent political environment is problematic\(^7\).

Recognising this chequered trend, many Islamist political parties such as Morocco’s Justice and Development Party (JDP), Tunisia’s Islamic Nahda Party, Malaysia’s Parti Se-Islam Malaysia (PAS) and Indonesia’s Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS) have moderated their political stance. Each of these Islamist parties was initially fundamentalist and committed to the creation of an Islamic state. However, conditioned by the realities of electoral politics, responding to the ideational shift and aspirations of the majority of Muslims and learning from the authoritarian excesses of Islamic states, many Islamist parties have pragmatically shelved their Islamic state agenda. They have instead shifted their focus on ‘good governance’, diversified their membership and electoral support base. This shift in focus has been facilitated by the influence of younger, globally oriented and media savvy party activists. Kurzman and Naqvi found that in three-quarters of Islamist party platforms, democracy is defined in secular terms – the selection of a government by the majority of voting citizens.

Even Islamist parties endorsing the comprehensive implementation of sharia do not support the Iranian Islamic state’s concept of *velayat-e faqih* – rule by supreme legal experts or the guardian council\(^8\). Their assessment of the limitations of the Islamic state paradigm has no doubt been influenced by the writings of prominent Iranian clerics and intellectuals such as Abdolkarim Soroush, Mohsen Kadivar and Mojtahed-Shabesteri. Rejecting the velayat-e faqih concept, Soroush asserts that citizens are the

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only source of legitimate state authority and thus have the right to demand accountability from the government. Challenging the velayat-e faqih’s notion of divine sovereignty, Soroush notes that as human understanding of religion is incomplete and imperfect, even the ulama does not possess a definitive understanding of religion. Similarly, Mojtahed-Shabestari maintains that the message of God is subject to individual interpretations and experience and thus cannot be imposed by the state or other groups in society. Like many Islamic clerics and Muslim intellectuals, Soroush and Mojtahed-Shabestari have renounced the Islamic state even though they were once staunch supporters of the 1979 revolution.

In recognition of this global Islamist shift, prominent Islamist intellectual and head of the Tunisian Islamic Nahda party, Rachid Ghannouchi has suggested that “until an Islamic shura (consensus) system of government is established, the second best alternative for Muslims is a secular democratic regime…. [that] respects the fundamental rights of all people without discrimination and without commitment to a religious frame of reference. What matters in such a system is that despotism is averted. A democratic secular system of government is less evil than a despotic system of government that claims to be Islamic.”

In many respects, the global Islamist shift conforms with the political moderation thesis. Put simply, the thesis purports that the inclusion of Islamist parties and movements within the political mainstream leads to their political moderation as they trade off their ideological rigidity for electoral viability. In line with this thesis, many Islamist parties have terminated their support for an Islamic state, removed the word ‘jihad’ from party platforms (including the Egyptian Brotherhood) and articulated the rights of women and minorities. Their ideological evolution is often shaped by an exposure to global norms and plural values and the rise of a younger generation of pragmatic activists within the Islamic party and movement. In her pioneering study of Islamists parties in Jordan and Yemen, Jillian Schwedler demonstrated that the inclusion of Islamists may deflate radicalism and can turn radicals into moderates; turn fence-sitters into moderates; encourage moderates to become even more moderate; and provide moderates with opportunities to increase their visibility and efficacy.
It is worth noting that the policy shifts within some Islamist parties are not necessarily indicative of a normative ideological reconfiguration. It could well be that these policy shifts are reflective of an oscillation – with different factions within the Islamist party or movement seeking to influence positions, bargain and manoeuvre as they react to internal and external stimuli. Moreover, political moderation is rarely linear, often incremental and staggered and subject to reversals. Electoral alliances with secular-based political parties and left-oriented nationalists often leads to an incremental approach towards sharia, an emphasis on sharia values rather than sharia law or the abandonment of sharia altogether.

Vali Nasr and Carrie Wickham remind us that the policy shifts of Islamist parties and movements often emerge not from a normative revision in ideology but from pragmatic political calculation. It would appear that there is a difference between moderation of strategy and moderation of ideology. This then begs the question: Are Islamist parties likely to revert to the Islamic state agenda once they are in control of government? Driven by these considerations, secular authoritarian regimes have long used the ‘one person, one vote, one time’ argument to dismiss domestic and international demands for genuine political reform.

**Silent Revolution in Global Muslim Aspirations**

Various qualitative and quantitative studies consistently indicate that Muslims strongly value democracy and secular-based political systems that accommodate religiosity. The World Values survey (1981-2007) of Muslim majority societies found that in all but one outlier Muslim country (Pakistan), public support for democracy was equal to or even greater than in Western countries. Significantly, Muslim respondents strongly favour multi-party elections but expect political leaders to be inspired by religious values. Moreover, the Muslim mainstream tends to be politically liberal but culturally conservative.

Similarly, the most comprehensive and systematic survey of contemporary Muslim perceptions undertaken by the Gallop World Poll (2001-2007) found that Muslims overwhelmingly support democracy, believing that it is central to a more just and progressive society. Instructively, Muslims are inclined to support the passive secular democracy model which does not insist on a strict separation of state and religion.
They are thus disinclined to support the strict separation of state and religion practised by assertive secular states such as France and Kemalist Turkey. However, they are also not supportive of Islamic states governed by traditional sharia, as dictated by the state.

The key findings of the Gallop World Poll\textsuperscript{20}, in relation to Muslim perceptions of democracy and secularism are worth reiterating:

- An overwhelming number of Muslims support democracy, believing that it is the key to a more just society and to progress.
- Muslims indicate that the lack of political freedom is what they least admire about the Islamic and Arab world. However, they do not favour the wholesale adoption of Western models of democracy and secularism.
- The majority of Muslims would like to see a religious form of democracy with the sharia as one source of legislation, albeit a restricted source.
- Most Muslims desire a system of government in which religious principles and democratic values co-exist.
- A significant majority in many Muslim countries say religious leaders should play no direct role in drafting a country’s constitution, writing national legislation, determining foreign policy, deciding how women dress in public or what is published in newspapers.
- Most Muslims do not want a rigidly secular or Islamic state.

More recently, the 2011 Pew Global Attitudes Survey\textsuperscript{21} found that large majorities in many Muslim-majority countries believed that democracy is preferable to any other form of government (see Table 1). By wide margins, Muslims surveyed also believed that Islam’s influence in politics is positive. These surveys consistently affirm that there is strong Muslim support for popular sovereignty, sharia, Islamic values and a public role for religion without the trappings of an Islamic state. Is this a contradiction? Or does it signify the phenomenon of passive secularism discussed above. Endorsing the significance of a religiously oriented passive secularism in Indonesia, recent survey data of Muslim attitudes undertaken by Mujani and Liddle suggest that Indonesian Muslim support for sharia is essentially linked to the yearning for stronger Islamic values\textsuperscript{22}. However, this yearning for Islamic values does not
necessarily translate to support for an Islamic state, Islamist parties committed to the Islamic state or the imposition of mandatory sharia for all Muslims.

Table 1 Muslim views of democracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable</th>
<th>For someone like me, it doesn’t matter what kind of government we have</th>
<th>DK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on Muslims only.


**Varieties of Secularism in the West**

The relationship between Islam, secularism and the state remains one of the most contentious and misunderstood issues in both the Muslim and non-Muslim Worlds. Part of this misunderstanding stems from confusion over the terms secularism, separation of religion and the state, sharia, Islamic state and the common assumption that the secular and the sacred are mutually exclusive. Not surprisingly, fierce disagreements remain about the status of Islam and sharia in the constitutions and political systems in Muslim-majority states – from the quasi-secular states of Indonesia and Malaysia, the secular state of Turkey, Islamic monarchy of Saudi Arabia, Islamic Republic of Iran, ambiguous Islamic state of Pakistan and the fledgling Islamic states of Afghanistan and Iraq. To be sure, ambiguity about the status of Islam within the state has led to inter and intra-religious tensions and political instability. Conservative Islamists and opportunistic politicians are inclined to exploit this ambiguity by expanding the jurisdiction of sharia which has impinged on the rights of non-Muslims, women and secular-oriented Muslims.

Employing Ahmet Kuru’s conceptual framework in this paper (see Fig. 1), passive secularism generally refers to state neutrality towards various faiths and the public
visibility of religion. By contrast, assertive secularism refers to the state favouring a secular worldview in the public sphere and confining religion to the private sphere. Passive secular states include Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia and Indonesia and assertive secular states include France and Kemalist Turkey. Not surprisingly, there are different varieties of passive and assertive secularism.

Fig. 1 Continuum of state-religion regimes and secularism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Islamic state</th>
<th>State with established religion</th>
<th>Secular state</th>
<th>Antireligious state</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passive secularism</td>
<td>Assertive secularism</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>


The US, France and Turkey are secular states with constitutions that do not contain any specific reference to a particular religion. However, they have pursued different approaches towards religion. For example, there is a strong official public visibility of religion in the US but not in France or Turkey. In the US, the motto, ‘In God We Trust’ appears on all coins and printed notes, the pledge of allegiance read by schoolchildren includes the statement ‘one nation under God’, the swearing-in of the President contains the statement ‘so help me God’ with the President placing his left hand on a Bible. Public visibility of religion in the US is not altogether surprising as the ‘separation of church and state’ codified in the US constitution is based on protecting the ‘free exercise’ of religion from state interference. Indeed, Casanova observes that in the US “it is not clear where the secular ends and religion begins”. However, what is clear about US secularism is its religious orientation – another manifestation of passive secularism.

The tradition of religious secularism in the West has its roots in the established church models of many secular liberal democracies that do not impose a strict separation of state and religion but operate along the lines of Alfred Stepan’s ‘twin tolerations’ model of state-religion relations. Affirming the Anglo-American variant of passive secularism, Stepan posits that secular democracy can be effectively nurtured when religious authorities and state institutions mutually recognise and respect the “minimal
boundaries of freedom of action”. Stepan proposes that religious communities be accorded the autonomy to worship privately, advance their interests in the public sphere and sponsor organisations - as long as they do not violate the liberty of others\(^27\). At the same time, religious institutions should not have a constitutionally guaranteed right to dictate, limit or veto decisions made by a democratically elected government\(^28\). As the boundaries between religion and state are periodically debated and negotiated, they are expected to shift with time\(^29\). Importantly, the ongoing debate and negotiation between the state and religion over acceptable boundaries should occur on the basis of mutual respect towards each other’s autonomous spheres. For Stepan, the lesson of this form of passive secularism lies not in church-state separation but in the constant political construction and reconstruction of the ‘twin tolerations’\(^30\). This form of passive secularism accepts the presence of religious symbols in the public sphere and the diversity of religious perspectives.

Many secular liberal democracies in the West do not impose a strict separation of state and religion but operate along the lines of Stepan’s ‘twin tolerations’ model of state-religion relations. Indeed, Jonathan Fox’s global study of religious legislation found that all liberal democracies, except the United States, that have separation of religion and state (SRAS) clauses in their constitution also have religious legislation\(^31\). Indeed, the courts often allow governments to by-pass or disregard SRAS clauses. It would appear that secularism in many democracies is strongly based on concessions, reconciliations and settlements rather than a strict separation between the religion and the state.

States with established churches, recognised official religions that practise a form of passive secularism include Norway, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Sweden and Britain. In Germany, Protestantism and Catholicism are recognised as official religions. Christian Democrat political parties have frequently governed in Germany, Austria, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands. The Queen of England is the head of the Church of England as well as the head of state. Passive secularism exists within the constraints of religion, tradition, church, public opinion, legislation and the constitution. It does not restrict religion from the public sphere but attempts to treat all religions fairly. These constraints have gone some way towards restricting extremist and intolerant tendencies from being tolerated by the state and society\(^32\). Significantly,
many states with established churches tend to have a relatively consistent record of protecting the rights of religious minorities. A strict separation of church and state is thus not a necessary condition for democracy to take root.

It would appear that laicite or the French model of assertive secularism, which seeks to control religious expression by erasing it from the public sphere, is relatively unique in the West. This anti-clerical secularism was strongly shaped by the French revolution in 1789 which overthrew the historical alliance between the Catholic Church and the monarchy. The conflict was very much zero-sum – a ‘war of the two Frances’\(^3\)\(^3\). The separation of the state and church was codified in 1905 and updated in 2004\(^3\)\(^4\). The French policy of banning the hijab (headscarf) in public schools and banning the niqab (attire which conceals the body and face) in the public sphere, in the name of secularism, has arguably undermined the secular ideal. In many respects, these assertive secular policies are reflective of the ascendency of assimilation and the rejection of multiculturalism despite the changed social realities of French society. French assertive secularism has effectively ignored the religious dimension of immigrant identity on the questionable premise that this dimension would dissolve with social integration.

The French experience of secularism suggests that assertive secular states are often unaware of their biased assumptions and universalising tendencies and exhibit blind spots. Even though assertive secular states claim to stand outside the contested terrain of religion and politics, they do not. Assertive secularism thus has the potential to undermine democratic politics for excluding from public deliberation those who dissent from secular politics\(^3\)\(^5\). Elisabeth Hurd astutely observes that assertive secularism has contributed to the following risks: backlash from proponents of non-secular alternatives who are excluded from deliberations; inability in initiating new approaches to the negotiation between religion and politics; blindness to the limitations of secularism\(^3\)\(^6\).

**Streams of Secularism in Democratising Muslim States**

**Preserving Indonesia’s Passive Secular *Pancasila* State**

Indonesia’s Pancasila model of religion-state relations is worthy of close examination, not least because the country experienced the political convulsions associated with
regime change more than ten years before the ongoing ‘Arab Spring’. It is also the most populous Muslim-majority country and, according to Freedom House, the most robust democracy in the Muslim World and since 2005 remains one of two Muslim-majority countries that has been classified as ‘Free’. Indonesia is the third most populous democracy in the world, after India and the US. Unfortunately, these important considerations tend to be under-appreciated by leading political scientists studying religion-state relations in the Muslim World. Primarily focused on the Middle East, leading comparativists tend to examine Indonesia in a cursory fashion, largely integrating it into multi-country and quantitative studies.

Typical of passive secular states, Indonesia does not exhibit a strict separation of religion and state nor does it have an established religion. Indonesia’s Pancasila state is thus not a strictly secular or religious state. It exhibits a strong degree of accommodation and inclusion and is described by Stepan as a “respect all, positive cooperation, principled distance” model - approximating his twin tolerations framework of passive secularism. In contrast to the assertive secularism of the French and Kemalist Turkish states, Indonesia’s Pancasila passive secularism is flexible in policy terms. For example, it has obligatory public holidays for the majority Muslims as well as minority faiths.

Indonesia’s religious-friendly but secular-oriented national ideology, Pancasila, accepts the presence of religion in public life and promotes the belief in God, rather than Islam - even though approximately 90% of Indonesians are Muslims. This inclusive secularism was adopted because the country post-colonial leaders recognised the dangers associated with alienating many Muslims and non-Muslims if Islam and sharia were to be accorded special status in the fledgling nation-state. As such, these post-colonial nationalist elites resisted the attempts of conservative Islamists to include the words “with the obligation for adherents of Islam to practice Islamic law” into the 1945 Constitution. Referred to as the Jakarta Charter, these words would have subjected Muslims firmly to the jurisdiction of sharia, a proposition that would not have been supported by many Indonesian Muslims who practice an inclusive and syncretic form of Islam. Non-Muslims protested against the Jakarta Charter’s seven words believing that the clause would have amounted to discrimination against other religions. To be sure, Indonesia’s Pancasila quasi-
secular state remains a major source of dissatisfaction to conservative Islamists who remain committed to expanding the jurisdicational sphere of the sharia.

Following the collapse of the authoritarian New Order regime in 1998, conservative Islamists have attempted, on two occasions, to amend Article 29 of the constitution with a view to making sharia mandatory for Muslims. Not deterred by the lack of success of these proposed constitutional amendments, conservative Islamists have colluded with local politicians to introduce sharia ‘through the back-door’ – via the passage of regional by-laws following the passage of national legislation in 1999 granting greater autonomy to the outer regions primarily to quell secessionist tendencies. Regional by-laws or regulations include the enforcement of compliance with sharia codes such as the wearing of the *hijab*, restrictions on the movement of women in the evening and the closure of nightclubs. The so-called Pornography Bill, initially sponsored by Islamist parties, was passed in 2008 despite strong opposition from non-Muslims and secular and progressive Muslim organisations.

In Indonesia’s Aceh province, the central government has facilitated the comprehensive implementation of sharia primarily to appease the popular separatist movement. As such, the shariah court system now has primacy over the civil courts. Specific Islamic criminal offences not found in national laws have been implemented. These include sharia laws on ‘correct belief’, liquor, gambling and illicit relations. In 2002, the Islamic dress code became mandatory and in the following year, another law was passed allowing for the severe punishment of unmarried couples caught in an intimate act or in close proximity. The punishment for this breach is whipping – a minimum of three and a maximum of nine lashes.

Ironically, Indonesian’s fledgling democracy has provided the space for conservative Islamists to pursue their Islamic state agenda following decades of restricted political activity during the authoritarian New Order regime. Since the fall of the regime in 1998, conservative Islamists have had some success in infiltrating mainstream Muslim organisations, promoting sectarianism and re-shaping Muslim attitudes towards sharia. For example, various surveys undertaken in the last few years suggest that many Indonesians support the mandatory introduction of sharia, are increasingly intolerant of non-Muslims and hold intolerant views on non-orthodox interpretations
of Islam. A 2010 decree issued by the Minister of Home Affairs ordered restrictions on the activity of the Ahmadiyah sect, based on an ambiguous 1965 law on blasphemy. Moreover, four provinces and seven districts have banned Ahmadiyah activities even though these local regulations contradict Article 28 of Indonesia’s constitution which guarantees freedom of religion. The successes of conservative Islamists suggest that they have been effective in pressuring the state to accommodate their demands. As the current government headed by President Yudhoyono appears unwilling to act decisively on sensitive issues pertaining to Islam, conservative Islamists influenced by Wahhabi ideology are more influential now than they were during the authoritarian New Order era. Acting through the influential Indonesian Council of Ulama (Majlis Ulama Indonesia), conservative Islamists have been able to issue a fatwa against Ahmadiyah and another against pluralism, secularism and liberalism.

Paradoxically, Indonesia’s democratisation has enabled illiberal Islamist actors and organisations greater space to promote sectarian politics and erode the rights of religious minorities and secular Muslims. However, the numerical growth in Islamist parties since the fall of the New Order regime has not resulted in a concomitant rise in their electoral fortunes. In the 2009 elections, the 13% electoral support for the major Islamist parties PKS (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera) and PPP (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan) slipped from the 15% support attained in the 2004 elections. Electoral support for Islamic-organisation based parties PKB (Partain Kebangkitan Bangsa) and PAN (Partai Amanat Nasional) also dropped from 17% in 2004 to 11% in 2009. Islamic state advocates in Indonesia remain small in number and, if the 2009 electoral support for Islamist parties is any indication, in decline. Based on their analysis of Indonesian electoral trends and surveys conducted between 2004-2009, Mujani and Liddle purport that secular democracy is being consolidated in Indonesia with Islamist parties of all varieties losing electoral support to secular parties.

Illiberal Islamist undercurrents have been counter-balanced by the forces animating ‘civil Islam’ that are committed to deepening and consolidating Indonesia’s democratisation. Recognising the incongruity of the Islamic state agenda in Indonesia’s multi-religious polity, the forces of ‘civil Islam’ subscribe to an Islam based on religious tolerance and support practical solutions to social problems. The
largest Muslim organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, have long maintained that Islam need not be adopted as the official state religion or that the jurisdiction of the sharia be expanded to promote Islamic values and identity.

Leading Islamic scholars who have contributed significantly to the intellectual discourse on ‘civil Islam’ include Nurcholish Majid and Abdurrahman Wahid. Nurcholish is well known for his pronouncement in the early 1970s that *sekuarisisasi* (secularism) is a liberating process as it allows for a re-evaluating of religious thought and practice. He also opposed the establishment of the Islamic state and Islamic parties, seeing them as mere political constructs. Like other progressive reformists, Nurcholish’s prioritised ethics over political power and saw the Quran as essentially a book of ethical and moral guidance rather than a text that deals with the details of political life\(^4\). Former head of the largest traditionalist Islamic organisation Nahdlatul Ulama (1984-1999) and President of Indonesia, Abdurrahman Wahid was also a staunch proponent of the Pancasila secular state and religious pluralism. For example, during his term as President, Confucianism was recognised as an official religion in 2001, together with Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism.

Many progressive Islamic scholars and Muslim intellectuals remain committed to preserving the spirit of Indonesia’s quasi-secular Pancasila state as championed by Nurcholish Majid and Abdurrahman Wahid. Indonesia’s vibrant civil society has been active in challenging the attempts of conservative Islamists and opportunistic politicians to expand the jurisdiction of sharia. Inter alia, the advocates of ‘civil Islam’ have also focused on promoting good governance by scrutinising government budgets, uncovering corruption scandals and initiating major political reforms in recognition that good governance is a key pillar in safeguarding Indonesia’s Pancasila secular democracy.

**Post-Islamism and the ‘Clash of Secularisms’ in Turkey**

Following its establishment in 1923, the Turkish assertive secular state has exhibited an almost neurotic fear of religion by insisting on eradicating religion from the public sphere. In contrast to Stepan’s ‘twin tolerations’ paradigm, religious institutions are not autonomous but under state control via the Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA). The state educates, appoints and pays religious professionals attached to the
DRA, approves the content of Friday services and enforces laws pertaining to the usage of religious symbols and attire. It funds the construction of mosques and generally regulates Islam. The Kemalist assertive secular establishment, which includes the Constitutional Court, major industrialists and the military, have consistently undermined Islamist parties and ousted the Islamist Welfare Party-led government in 1997. Female teachers and students, even in Islamic schools, are banned from wearing the hijab. In 1998, a law was passed requiring school children to complete eight years of secular education before they are allowed to take Quranic classes. These are only a few examples of the secular fundamentalist orientation of the Kemalist state.

Significantly, Turkey’s assertive secularism has undergone gradual reconfiguration under the stewardship of the Justice and Development Party (JDP, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi or AKP) government led by Raccep Erdogan - a politician with an Islamist past. Elected to office in 2002 with 34% of the vote, the JDP’s strengthening political clout has unsettled the Kemalist secular establishment. The party’s electoral support has grown from 47% in 2007 to 50% in the recent 2011 elections. Under the JDP, the Turkish secular state has evolved from the Kemalist assertive secular paradigm towards an inclusive secularism that is reflective of the religiosity of the Turkish public. This evolution of Turkish secularism is facilitating a re-bridging of state and society whilst recasting the notion of secularism49.

The confinement of religion to the private sphere does not reflect public sentiment in Turkey and is therefore unsustainable. For example, surveys indicate that 76% of Turks oppose the ban on the headscarf and 64% of Turkish women wear some type of headscarf50. Moreover, Ahmet Kuru predicts that the decline of assertive secularism will be sustained by Turkey’s deepening democratisation. Recognising this likelihood, advocates of assertive secularism have had to rely on the unelected military and judiciary to advance their interests. By contrast, passive secularism is likely to flourish in a political environment that is not only plural but also theologically diverse51.

The JDP is not anti-secular, as alleged by its critics, but maintains an interpretation of secularism that differs from the Kemalist establishment. The critical debate in Turkey
then is not whether Turks are for or against secularism but is centred on the struggle for different interpretations of secularism – top-down authoritarian assertive secularism held by the Kemalist establishment versus the bottom-up passive secularism promoted by the JDP and supported by a broad national consensus. However, recent events in Turkey indicate that the Kemalist establishment may have reverted to its former muscular tactics. From mid-2011, the political legitimacy of the JDP has been challenged by the mass resignations of the armed forces chief and heads of the army, navy and air-force, unhappy with the ongoing investigations of alleged military plots to oust the JDP government. Currently, about one-tenth of the army’s generals are in custody over an alleged plot presented at an army seminar in 2003. However, despite the gravity of this latest ‘clash of secularisms’, the military lacks the clout to initiate a military coup – a typical response to past conflicts.

To be sure, the compatibility between Muslim society and inclusive secular democracy under the stewardship of the JDP government is closely watched by political observers, Islamist and secular oriented parties in and beyond the Muslim World. Questions commonly raised include the following:

- To what extent is the JDP government, a party with Islamist roots, successfully rehabilitating the stature of secularism in the Middle East and the larger Muslim World?
- To what extent is the pragmatic secularist orientation of the JDP an attractive model for other Islamist parties in the Muslim World?
- Is Turkey’s democratising secular state more effectively promoting Islam and Islamic values compared to supposed Islamic states such Iran and Saudi Arabia?

Endorsing the JDP’s political model, the leader of Tunisia’s Islamist Nahda Party Rachid Ghannouchi noted in an interview with the Financial Times (18 January, 2011) that “Our thought is similar to that of the AKP in Turkey, currently in government…there have been many changes to the Muslim World, democratic thought has spread and Islamists have realised the danger of dictatorships and the benefits of democracy and they have also realised the harm of Islamic regimes that are not democratic”. In Malaysia and Indonesia, Islamist parties such as PAS and the PKS
include an increasingly influential and pragmatic faction inspired by the Turkish JDP government - commonly referred to as the ‘Erdoganists’. ‘Erdoganist’ factions and franchises have emerged in many Islamist political parties and movements throughout the Muslim World. These ‘Erdoganists’ are inspired by the JDP government’s ability to demonstrate that the Muslim voice can be heard within a democratising and economically vibrant secular state. The JDP’s program has also affirmed the power of an inclusive Muslim secularism that accommodates public religiosity. ‘Erdoganists’ from PAS and PKS have sent ‘study teams’ to Turkey to investigate the JDP strategies. Support for the JDP’s political model in the Muslim World has deepened following Erdogan’s more confrontational approach towards Israel regarding it policies in the West Bank and Gaza. A 2011 Pew Global Attitudes survey conducted in March and April 2011 found that popularity for Erdogan was 78% in Egypt, 72% in Jordan and 64% in Lebanon.

The JDP arguably exemplifies a new breed of ‘post-Islamists’ that have arguably embraced ‘new Islamist thinking’ and see no fundamental contradiction between Islam, popular sovereignty, the rule of law, human rights and an inclusive secular democracy. They recognise that these principles provide the political space and legitimacy to organise and promote their ideals in government and civil society. The legitimising power of popular sovereignty is not lost to a party whose leadership has been detained, harassed and expelled from government by unelected arms of the Kemalist state.

Frequent references to human rights conventions have allowed the JDP leadership to strengthen their ties with liberals and reformists in Turkey and the wider Muslim World. ‘Walking the talk’, the JDP government has signed and ratified conventions such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. At the international level, ratifying these conventions assists with Turkey’s integration into the European Union (EU) and the West, whilst maintaining a modernising global identity for this Muslim-majority country.

Post-Islamist parties like the JDP are inclined to focus on good governance and are pragmatic in policy terms. The focus on the ‘politics of services’ (hizmet partisi) can
be attributed to Erdogan’s experience as a former mayor of Istanbul, a municipality of 12 million people. His period as mayor reinforced the importance of attaining political legitimacy by providing public services and meeting material needs. They include providing essential services such as roads, sewage and garbage collection and running water. Much of the JDP’s electoral support thus stems from its reputation of good governance – in this respect no different from other governments in plural democracies

Distancing itself from its Islamist roots, the JDP has avoided making religion the centre of the party’s platform. It has removed all reference to Islam from its electoral platforms and does not attend the International Forum of Islamist Parliamentarians gathering. Instead the JDP cultivates a political identity based on the label ‘conservative democracy’. This label allows the party to be an inclusive and mainstream mass-based party that is attractive to a broad and diverse base of supporters. This would not have been possible had it adopted a rigid Islamist ideological identity. But beyond labels, it is not really clear what constitutes the key ideological components underpinning the JDP’s conservative democracy label? However, what is more apparent is that like the Christian Democrat parties in Europe, the JDP is socially conservative but politically liberal. The JDP is certainly more liberal than the Kemalist secularists who have in the past supported military coups and interventions when they perceive secularism to be in danger.

To its credit, the party has initiated several ‘democratic openings’ to address current and historical challenges confronting marginal communities such as the Alevi, Armenians, Roma and Kurds. However, on gender issues the JDP remains conservative, like other conservative parties in the West. In the party’s program, women are generally referred to within the context of the family as primary caregivers. The party is also opposed to the implementation of quotas to improve women’s political participation. By contrast, women’s rights have been largely restricted to the realms of religious freedom – a reference to the right to don the headscarf.

Like many conservative democrat parties, the JDP tends to be supportive of neo-liberal economic policies which have produced new economic actors not aligned to
the Kemalist establishment. Thus far, these neo-liberal policies have reaped economic dividends. Inflation has been dramatically reduced to 7.2% while wages have increased and economic growth registered at nearly 9% in 2010 – the highest among the G-20 nations after China. This combination of economic success and political liberalisation is unique in the Muslim World and indeed the larger international community. Importantly, the JDP leadership is acutely aware that its electoral success is not due to its identification as an Islamist party but strongly driven by its perceived governance capability.

Post-Islamist Shift or Political Oscillation? - Malaysia’s Partai Agama Se Islam (PAS)

The political evolution of the Malaysia’s oldest and largest Islamist party, PAS is consistent with many moderate Islamist parties in the Muslim World. Like most Islamist parties, PAS is theologically and politically a ‘broad mosque’ that includes conservatives, moderates and liberals. Conservative ulama (Islamic scholars) and ethno-religious nationalists, sometimes referred to as the purists, had until recently dominated the party. Inter alia, they are ideologically committed to building an Islamic state in the multi-religious society even though Muslims constitute little more than 60% of the population. By contrast, the rise of the progressive faction, commonly referred to as the ‘Erdoganists’, wish to project an image of the party that is acceptable to the majority of Malaysians in order to expand the party’s electoral base. Driven by these pragmatic goals, PAS progressives are willing to revise the concept of an Islamic state to reflect the pluralistic social realities of Malaysian society and has thus abandoned altogether the implementation of draconian hudud (sharia criminal) laws. There are fully cognizant of the fact that PAS cannot win national government on its own and has only done well electorally when it has cooperated with other secular-based parties and competed on a secular platform. By contrast, PAS performed dismally in the 2004 elections when a newly formulated Islamic state blueprint, elevated as a key party platform, led to a substantial proportion of non-Muslims and secular oriented Muslims deserting the party. Secular based civil society organisations and newspapers also disendorsed PAS in the 2004 elections. Following this electoral debacle, the PAS leadership intiated wide-ranging policy reforms to realign the party closer to the political mainstream.
PAS progressives have made considerable headway in party elections particularly from 2005, when they began to win positions in the central committee. In 2011, delegates elected a non-ulama, Mohamad Sabu, as Deputy President – the first time since 1983. Approximately 60% of PAS’s newly elected central committee members now hail from the progressive faction. Significantly, of the three PAS Vice-Presidents (one newly elected) elected in 2011, none are ulamas. In the past, Vice-Presidents hailed from the ulama group. It would appear that PAS delegates are willing to pragmatically support the progressive faction’s call for change as long as it is incremental.

The policy agenda of PAS’s new generation of post-Islamist politicians is strongly driven by governance issues such as corruption and profligate public spending on mega-projects, electoral and law and order reform, education and health, and poverty eradication. The discourse on democracy and human rights is commonly used in promoting governance reform. To advance the governance reform agenda, PAS progressives work closely with pro-democracy civil society organisations with the same vision. For example, PAS Deputy President Mohamad Sabu has campaigned alongside the non-government organisation Bersih in the push for electoral reform and was actively involved in Bersih’s electoral reform protests marches in 2007 and 2011. Non-Muslim support has also been strengthened by the fielding of a non-Muslim woman candidate in the 2008 election and the formation of a PAS Supporters Club that boasts more than 20,000 non-Muslim members. In 2010, the PAS Supporters Club was formally granted party wing status and upgraded in status to the PAS Supporters Congress. A 2001 amendment to the party constitution has ensured that at least one Vice-President is a woman.

The shift in PAS’s policy agenda away the Islamic state goal is evident by its recent promotion of the slogan negara kebajikan (welfare/benevolent state). This slogan was initially flagged by PAS President Hadi Wang in a 2011 speech. Resembling the JDP’s ‘politics of services’, negara kebajikan is based on a commitment to good governance and serving the material needs of the Malaysian public. A senior PAS official Mujahid Rawa frankly acknowledges that the negara kebajikan slogan “reflects the political maturity of PAS in trying to adjust itself to the reality of Malaysian society”. Without doubt, PAS’s strategic shift allows it to attract a larger
share of the Muslim middle-ground, traditionally inclined to vote for UMNO (United Malay national Organisation) - the dominant party in the BN (Barisan Nasional) coalition government that has ruled Malaysia uninterruptedly since political independence in 1957. PAS is now strategically well positioned to contest in the upcoming elections, in coalition with other secular-based political parties, expected in 2012. The key question then is whether PAS’s shift is reflective of a wider ideological reconfiguration or merely another phase of political oscillation which could just as readily revert back to the conservative policy agenda of the Islamic state?

**Conclusion**

Muslims are increasingly aware of the multiple forms of secularism, particularly the varieties of secularism that accommodates the presence of religion in the public and political sphere. Moreover, the experience of passive secular democracies in the West and the Muslim World demonstrates that secularisation does not necessarily lead to the erosion of religious belief. Indeed, religious belief and forms of spirituality can and have persisted within the negotiated processes of state secularism. Moreover, the experience of passive secularism demonstrates that the rigid ‘wall of separation’ between religion and the state in France and Kemalist Turkey is excessive, unnecessary and counterproductive in nation-building terms. By contrast, the Indonesian experience demonstrates that the passive secularism in Muslim-majority countries can be fortified by democratic institutions and processes, a functioning state and economy and vibrant civil society. Passive secularism is also energised by a reformist Islamic discourses that promotes the harmonisation of Islam and secular democracy.67

The reformist Islamic discourse allows Muslims to support the inclusive secular state68 and supports a post-Islamist religious secularism that incorporates the sacred within the framework of the secular state. This shift towards a post-Islamist secularity is not unique to the Muslim World but reflective of a global religiosity that is strongly characterised by universalism, multiplicity and nuance. Making sense of this global religiosity, prominent scholars of religion and society such Jose Casanova has observed that secularism and religiosity are much more complex, nuanced and intertwined than commonly assumed. Thus, the “attempt to establish a wall of separation between ‘religion’ and ‘politics’ is both unjustified and counterproductive
for democracy itself…”, as curtailing the free exercise of the civil and political rights of religious citizens will infringe on the fabric of democratic civil society.

Paradoxically, the Islamic state model has been discredited by the theological contradictions, governance failures, political repression and economic record of Islamic states such as Iran and Saudi Arabia. Prominent reformist ulama and Islamic intellectuals have renounced the Islamic state for politicising Islam and upholding authoritarian political structures that serve the interests of ruling elites. Echoing the critics of authoritarian secular states, they call for a separation of religion from the control of state institutions. The Islamic state and authoritarian secular state models appear to have lost much of their appeal in contrast to the passive secular democratic state model which is gaining political traction in the Muslim World. This is demonstrated by the sustainability of Indonesian’s inclusive secular constitutional moorings despite ongoing challenges by Islamists; electoral successes and governance credibility of the JDP government that have allowed it to cautiously reconfigure Turkey’s assertive secular state; political moderation and oscillation of Islamist parties such as Malaysia’s PAS and ongoing protest movements fuelling the ‘Arab Spring’. Instead of the polarising Islamic state agenda commonly touted in the 1980s and 1990s, many Islamist parties and movements have focused on good governance, democracy and economic development and appear willing to work within the framework of the passive secular democratic state – an inclusive and pluralistic framework acceptable to majorities in Muslim-majority countries.

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3 In this paper, Islamists refer to organisations and movements that strive to establish an Islamic state based on the implementation of comprehensive sharia as determined by state recognised ulama. Islamism is rooted in the view that the key to reviving the Muslim World is not by emulating the West but by the revival of Islam.  
4 Asef Bayat, 2011.  
5 Asef Bayat, 2011.  
7 Kurzman and Naqvi, 2010.  
8 Kurzman and Naqvi, 2010, p.52.  
Ghobadzadeh and Rahim, 2012.
16 Nasr, 2005.
18 World Values Survey, 4th and 5th waves, (Available at www.worldvaluessurvey.org)
20 Esposito and Mogahed, 2007, p.29-63.
21 Available at http:pewresearch.org
26 Jose Casanova refers to secularism as a political constitutional regime that determines the political boundaries between state and religion. By contrast, secularisation is a social process which can lead to:
   a) the decline of religion in terms of belief, affiliation and practice;
   b) individualisation and privatisation of religion, with the erosion of its public role;
27 Only the courts can place constraints on religious groups after their violation of laws.
28 “Democratic institutions must be free, within the bounds of the constitution and human right to generate policies. Religious institutions should not have constitutionally privileged prerogatives that allow them to mandate public policy to democratically elected governments”. A. Stepan, ‘Religion, Democracy and the ‘Two Tolerations’*, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.11, No.4, Oct. 2000, p. 39.
34 Yet the French state created the French Council of Muslim Faith in 2002 which in many respects contradicts the assertive secular republican policy of *laicite*.

Pancasila’s five principles include belief in God, national unity, social justice, popular sovereignty and just humanitarianism.


It is worth noting that the constitutional working committee on the proposal to amend Article 29 noted that Indonesia is not a religious state nor a secular state but “a state which gives a place of honour to religion” Cited in R.E. Elson, Nationalism, Islam, Secularism and the State in Contemporary Indonesia, in *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.64, No.3, June 2010, p.332.


Masykuri Abdillah, *Responses of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals to the Concept of Democracy*, (Hamburg: Baer, 1997).


See the JDP website at www.akpati.org.tr

Bubalo et al, 2008, p.73.


A 2004 survey by the Merdeka Centre revealed that 84% of Chinese and 73% of Indians felt that PAS was ‘not suitable’ for governing Malaysia. Cited in Julie C. Hwang, 2010, p.648.


Cited in Anil Netto, 2011.


Jose Casanova, 2006, p.20.