Religious Movements and Parties in Turkey and Their Implications for the Relationship between Religion and Democracy

Using the experience of Islamist parties in Turkey as a comparative example, I propose to explore the question whether political parties with deeply held religious ideologies can integrate themselves into liberal democracy. This is an extension of the query whether the rise of illiberal political groups eventually leads to the end of liberal society, the assumption being that religious ideology is incapable of tolerating dissent or pluralism. In particular, I will examine the rise of the "Islamist" Justice and Development Party ("AKP") and its electoral victories in 2002 and 2007 that explain its ability to shift away from dogmatic ideology to conservative, yet democratic positions. I will also consider the influence of explicitly religious groups like the Gülen movement in Turkish politics and their implications for democracy.

This project fits within the mandate of the DCCIRP in a number of ways. Most importantly, it provides a comparison to consider whether the experience of negotiating the borders of religion and state in democracies is to some extent generalizable, or at least to explore whether experiences of Muslim democracy might inform Catholic experiences. This comparison should help to clarify which elements of the Catholic experience might relate to religion generally and which might be particular to Catholic faith or culture. I am especially interested in working with political scientists exploring the development and role of Catholic-influenced parties in Peru and Lithuania. I expect that my project will also be of great interest to Indonesian scholars who engage the role of religion in both Muslim and Catholic inspired political parties. Engaging scholars on these issues will deepen my research, since I propose that the development of the AKP resembles the Catholic experience within Christian Democratic or similar parties in Europe and Latin

America. More generally, my project brings Catholic and Islamic tradition into constructive dialogue. In addition to the substantive points of exploration that might be mutually beneficial, the engagement itself furthers the dialogue goals of the Society of Jesus and the broader Catholic Church.

My project will describe and raise theoretical questions about the definition and development of Islamic parties as a basis for considering whether the AKP is still "Islamic" (in the sense that many Christian democratic parties are no longer "Christian" or "Catholic"). I will consider the historical and economic context in which the AKP emerged, exploring the connection between democracy and development in Turkish politics and the impact of state policy on the Turkish Islamic landscape. This study will consider the most recent scholarly production related to these questions, paying particular attention to methodology as a barometer for gauging possible directions for future exploration.

My research project will attempt to explain in some detail the socio-political origins of Islamic spiritual and political movements in Turkey and the emergence of the Gülen Movement and the AKP. There will be some consideration of identity, ideology and leadership within the both groups. The unique roles of Said Nursi, Fethullah Gülen, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül will be considered.

The project will analyze the social and political impact of AKP rule and Gülen Movement influence on Turkey's internal and external politics. I plan to consider the Gülen Movement's ability to achieve legitimacy notwithstanding many of its progressive positions and the AKP's ability to establish a stable electoral base while confronting poverty, corruption, secularism, and religious touchstone issues such as the wearing of

headscarves. I will reflect on the 2007 election along with contemporary Constitutional Court decisions and the shift in Turkish political discourses from those emphasizing power sharing between the military and elected politicians to new discourses stressing human rights (cultural, religious and property rights in particular). Some have called the result a "conservative revolution." Regardless of the label, Turkey is being forced to reconsider its understanding of secularism, its pre-Republican religious and political traditions, and its conception of democracy.

My approach will be interdisciplinary, considering economics, theology, sociology, and history (among other disciplines), but I will be primarily concerned with their implications for law and government—especially the relationship between state power and religion. Beginning sections of the project are likely to have a strong historical component in tracing the origin and development of Islamic movements and parties in Turkey, rhetorically making the religious turn intelligible. Although I am likely to consider some empirical data, such as voting results and some economic statistics, the main methodological approach will be theoretical, with an emphasis on language and judicial decisionsmaking. I may also include outsider perspectives in my analysis. Depending on feasibility, I may consider developing an empirical survey to be used in Turkey. My working hypothesis is that religious movements and parties can transform so as to be compatible with liberal democratic civil society.

Although Necmettien Erbakan founded a precursor to contemporary Turkish Islamic parties in 1970, the important shift in the role of religion in Turkish democracy really began with Turgut Özal (and to a lesser extent Süleyman Demirel) in the 1980's and 1990's in blending Islamic sentiment with market economics and conservative

politics within center-right parties. Ironically, these parties were not able to maintain the sort of broad base created by the AKP, which was more explicitly linked to Islamists. I expect to challenge the characterization of a dualistic tension between Islamist parties on the one hand and secular parties on the other that is often portrayed in both Turkish and U.S. media. There is a rich mix of religious motivations, particularly within center-right parties like the Anavatan Partisi. Survey data of AKP voters complicates matters further. Although a plurality of AKP voters identify as "Islamist" (27%), the rest constitute a broad mix of seemingly unrelated ideological identifications. This may constitute evidence that the AKP has been able to transcend the religious commitments of its leaders to appeal to a broad segment of Turkish society.

The increasing Turkish fascination with the country's Ottoman past (in terms of religion and politics) has manifested itself in pop and literary culture, and this turn to pre-Republican political models may indicate a broader integration with the past. To some extent, economic prosperity (though admittedly with greater stratification) has paralleled increases in public religious expression as evidence that such an integration may provide new opportunities for civil society and human rights discourse.

The contention that the AKP is no longer an Islamic party is supported by some of the most recent and rigorous social science, such as the ethnographic work of Jennifer White, whose study of the reception of Islamist political parties in Istanbul. I will also engage scholars who have recently written on the role of Islam in Turkish politics, such as Hakan Yavuz, Ahmet Kuru and Soner Çağaptay. Given my initial reading, I have a somewhat optimistic view of the ability of religious parties to reconcile ideology with democracy and for a new synthesis in the landscape of Turkish political discourses.

However, it is unlikely that his portrayal will prove convincing to those who remain suspicious of religiously motivated leaders who have expressed the desire to impose their views on others and then obscure those positions with politically correct language. A key question will be whether Turkish religious groups and political parties have adapted only as a response to external government power, especially the judiciary, to moderate religiously motivated political positions, resulting in a political discourse which might not reflect the actual beliefs or commitments of religious citizens and parties. It is not clear whether leaders of religious parties or social movements have actually replaced deeply-held religious convictions with parallel secular commitments (to political conservatism, neo-liberal economics, or libertarianism for example). Instead, these new commitments may simply provide an acceptable secular vocabulary for restating policy positions. This part of the project will draw on my previous work on public articulations of the preferential option for the poor in public discourse.