

## **Three Arguments in Defense of Inclusive and Democratic Political Institutions in Islam**

Nader Habibi

Department of Economics and the Crown Center for Middle East Studies

Brandeis University

[nhabibi@brandeis.edu](mailto:nhabibi@brandeis.edu)

### **Bio:**

**Nader Habibi** is the Henry J. Leir Professor of Practice in the Economics of the Middle East at Brandeis University's Crown Center for Middle East Studies. Before joining Brandeis University in June 2007, he served as managing director of economic forecasting and risk analysis for Middle East and North Africa in Global Insight Ltd. Mr. Habibi has worked in academic and research institutions in Iran, Turkey and the United States since 1987. He earned a master's degree in systems engineering, and a PhD in Economics from Michigan State University. His most recent research projects are a) Economic relations of Middle Eastern countries with China, b) Economic and social conditions of Kurdish regions in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, and c) Economic relations of Turkey with Iran and Arab countries. Habibi served as director of Islamic and Middle East Studies at Brandeis University (August 2014-August 2019). Links to his publications are available at <https://naderhabibi.blogspot.com/>.

### **Abstract**

The political system of most predominantly Muslim countries is either authoritarian or semi-democratic. The common understanding of the Islamic texts on politics is that Islam calls obedience toward the rulers, which implies that it is compatible with the authoritarian mode of governance. In this article I argue that a careful examination of Quranic text and the Hadith (behavior and decisions of prophet Mohammad) demand that a Muslim society be governed as a democratic system. Citizens (believers) must obey the ruler, but the legitimacy of the ruler can only be assured by majority support in political elections. I also argue the rights and protections that have been granted to the people of the Book (Christian and Jews) implies that an Islamic society must guaranty freedom of lifestyle and belief for all citizens even when those behaviors and beliefs are considered sinful in Islam. Finally, the article argues that democracy will be beneficial for empowerment and economic prosperity of Muslim nations.

**Keywords:** Islam, Democracy, Economic Development, Authoritarianism, Quran, Civil Rights

## Introduction

One of the key debate questions among the scholars of Islamic political philosophy since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is whether Islam is compatible with democratic political institutions. This scholarly inquiry has also focused on whether democracy is an ideal political system for a predominantly Muslim society. This interest is rooted in the interactions of the Muslim world with the West in the past three centuries. Muslim scholars noticed the political and institutional transformation of the Western nations from absolute monarchies toward more inclusive democratic political systems, at the same time that these countries enjoyed significant industrial and technological advancements. As Muslim nations suffered defeat and humiliation under European colonial domination some Muslim scholars saw a connection between the democratic reforms and the empowerment of the Western countries such as the British Empire. In this essay I argue that democracy is not only good for Muslim countries, but it is the only form of political governance that is compatible with the teachings of Islam and its spirit.

The debate in the Islamic world about the ideal mechanisms for selection and replacement of political leaders, as well as the mutual obligations of the rulers and citizens, is much older and goes back to the golden age of enlightened Islamic civilization during the Abbasid Dynasty (750-1258)<sup>1</sup>. The leading political philosopher of classical Islam that addressed this issue was the 10th century philosopher Abu Nasr al-Farabi (872-950). al-Farabi, who was influenced by both Islamic thought, and Greek philosophers (primarily Aristotle and to a lesser extent Plato), believed that the ideal political system was the one governed by a prophet-philosopher, who can create a *Virtuous State* similar to the society of believers under Prophet Mohammad's rule. However, after the death of the Prophet Mohammed, who is viewed by Muslim as the last Abrahamic prophet ("*Khatam*

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<sup>1</sup> An example of these debates on political institutions is discussed in London (2017).

*al-Nabiyyīn*"), no other ruler can govern the Islamic policy according to direct divine guidance. Hence, the second-best alternative according to al-Farabi, is a political system in which deliberation and consultation (*shura*) is the basis for selection of leaders and collective policy decisions. He calls this political system the democratic city-state (*al-madīnah al-jamā'iyyah*) and believes that in such a society the freedom of debate and expression will allow the benevolent philosophers to rise to the top and bring the society as close as possible to the idealized *virtual state* ((Altayev and Suleimenov, 2017) and (Khalidi, 2003)).

Another Islamic philosopher whose ideas have been viewed as indirectly advocating for inclusive governance and tolerance of civil rights is Ibn khaldun (1332-1406), who analysed the lifecycle of ruling Arab and Barbar dynasties in his book *Moghadameh*. Ibn Khaldun argued that as various tribes compete for power, the tribe with higher level of social solidarity (*asabiyyah*) defeats others and establishes a dynasty. This dynasty achieves strength and reaches the peak of its power for a period of time. However, eventually the virtual values that contributed to the strength of the rising tribe give way to greed and corruption among the ruling elite as they get used to luxury and comfort. This transition gradually weakens the social solidarity of the ruling elite and leads to the defeat of the empire. For a civilization, these dynastic rises and falls, and the violent competition for power, are very costly as they lead to considerable loss of life and property during the transition of power (Abdullah, 2021). Ibn Khaldun advises the rulers to prevent the demise of their dynasty by adopting just and inclusive governance institutions. Several contemporary advocates of democracy in the Islamic world such as Malik Bennabi, Rashid

Ghannouchi, and Muhammad Asad have been inspired by the ideas of Ibn Khaldun and al-Farabi, (Amir, 2022).

This older philosophical debate however, had a limited scope relative to the 19<sup>th</sup> century debate, which was inspired by the emergence of political democracy in Europe. The pre-19<sup>th</sup> century debates also did not result in any substantial reforms toward inclusive governance in Muslim societies, but the modern debates have encouraged democratic reforms in several countries such as Turkey, Senegal and Malaysia<sup>2</sup>.

Overall, throughout most of the Islamic history, the Muslim countries and empires have been governed as authoritarian political systems. The Sultans of the Ottoman Empire (Turkish), the Khalifs of Abbasid Empire (Arab), the Shahs of the Safavid Empire (Iranian), and the rulers of many other dynasties in the Muslim world enjoyed absolute power without any accountability to the public. They all drew their legitimacy mostly from the Islamic institutions and the religious authorities (Ulama). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the European colonial rule in the Middle East came to an end, most of these absolute sultanic regimes evolved into authoritarian republics or authoritarian monarchies. In a few countries such as Iran the Islamists or the religious clerics gained control of the state, and the Islamic republics that they established have also been authoritarian in nature.

Some Muslim countries such as Turkey, Tunisia and Malaysia have moved toward democratic or semi-democratic (hybrid) political institutions, but many other predominantly Muslim countries remain under non-democratic rule (Stepan 2018). The rulers and political parties that establish a government in the name of Islam, justify their authoritarian rule based on their interpretation of the Quran and the recorded traditions ([Hadith](#)) of the early period of Islam under Prophet Mohammed. Accordingly, the Muslims (believers) have a religious obligation to respect

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<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of debates about democracy and Islam see Esposito and Voll (1996).

the ruler's authority. The primary foundation of this belief is a specific verse of Quran ([Surah Nisah, verse 59](#)) that calls for obedience to Allah, Prophet Muhammad, and the *ulu'l-amr*. In this verse “*ulu'l-amr*” refers to rulers and political leaders.

In this essay I argue that this is an incomplete interpretation of Quranic teachings and traditions of early Islam. By adding some other verses of Quran to these verses we can arrive at a different set of recommendations for political governance that are more compatible with democratic governance. I will also present a justification for tolerance of diversity in belief and lifestyle based on the attitude of Islam toward followers of Judaism and Christianity. Finally, in addition to these ideological justifications, I will present a practical reason as to why democratic accountability and respect for civil rights are necessary for empowerment of modern Islamic societies.

### **Argument One:**

If we limit our understanding of Islamic governance system to Verse 59 of Surah Nisah that was explained above, and a few [other verses](#) which convey the same meaning, then we will arrive at the conclusion that an authoritarian political system will be compatible with Islam. In such a system, once a ruler is in power, he can remain in power and select his successor. Hence questions of leadership and succession will remain under the control of the incumbent ruling elite, without any accountability to citizens or need for majority support.

This call to obedience, however, is not the only Quranic verse that defines the political institutions for an Islamic society. There are two other important Quranic verses which are also relevant for the political system of Islamic societies.

The first verse is [Verse 13 of Surah al-Hujurat](#):

***“Human beings, we created you all from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Verily the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God-fearing of you. Surely Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware. (49:13)”***

This verse can be interpreted as saying that all human beings are created as equal, and they have equal rights. In the context of an Islamic society’s political system this verse implies that all citizens must enjoy equal political rights.

The second relevant verse is [Verse 30 of Surah al-Bagharah](#):

***“Remember (when) your Lord said to the angels: "I am setting on the earth a vicegerent." The angels asked: "Will you set therein one who will cause disorder and corruption on it and shed blood, while we glorify You with Your praise (proclaim that You are absolutely free from any defect and that all praise belongs to You exclusively,) and declare that You alone are all-holy and to be worshipped as God and Lord." He said: "Surely I know what you do not know."***

The first sentence of this verse can be interpreted as saying that God appointed man as his vicegerent (successor or representative) on earth. For the political system of an Islamic country this can be interpreted as saying that all human beings have equal political responsibility as representatives of God on earth. As such they have a political duty to participate in the political

system and collective decisions. Now if we combine the teachings of these two verses of Quran, we can draw the following conclusions:

First, in the political system of an Islamic community all citizens enjoy equal political rights. Second, they also have a political responsibility as representatives of God on earth. This responsibility means that no individual can deny the political right of another person because every man and woman is a representative (vicegerent) of God. Therefore, it is forbidden for an individual to oppress the political rights of others. And it is equally forbidden for a person to allow his or her political rights to be suppressed by another individual.

Furthermore, since appointment and replacement of political leadership is the most important aspect of any political system, the main political responsibility of Muslims as the “representatives of God on earth”, is to participate in selection of political leaders. The logic behind this participation is that according to Islamic beliefs God is the only qualified being to appoint a leader for a Muslim society. Since God is silent, however, and does not directly reveal his preference, it is logical to assume that this responsibility falls on the shoulders of his representatives on earth (all adult human beings).

As a result, this selection process evolves into a collective decision-making process among a group of individuals with equal voting rights. When there is no consensus among these voting adults, the majority vote is the only mechanism that meets the Quranic principals of equity ([Verse 13 of Surah al-Hujurat](#)) and vice-regency ([Verse 30 of Surah al-Bagharah](#)).

In conclusion, Islam’s call on believers to obey their rulers ([Surah Nisah, verse 59](#)) is conditional on the legitimacy of the selection process, and the main source of political



legitimacy in an Islamic society is a majority support, which consists of approval by 50% plus one of the voters. It also follows that the transfer of leadership to a new leader must also be subject to majority support. While this majoritarian institution is a necessary condition for a modern democracy, it is not a sufficient condition. The above Quranic verses do not offer any guidelines on basic individual freedoms such as religious freedom, which are other pillars of a modern democracy, but they reject dictatorship and minority rule (oligarchy) political systems.

### **Argument Two:**

Islam has detailed rules and code of conduct for all aspects of life. It has a conservative dress and body coverage code for women. It forbids the consumption of alcohol and imposes restrictions on sexual behavior. It also has several religious obligations such as the daily prayer, fasting during the month of Ramadan and performance of the Hajj pilgrimage. Some Islamic governments such as the Islamic Republic of Iran have formally adopted these norms in their legal system and impose formal punishments on violators (Mir-Hosseini, 2010). In a democratic system, on the other hand the government does not enforce religious norms and obligations. Individuals are free to decide their level of compliance with the rules and norms of their religion.

Some conservative Muslims believe that the government must enforce the rules of Islam on personal behavior and expression of religious beliefs. This is equivalent to saying that since Islam is the only righteous religion all Muslims must obey the Islamic rules and perform their religious duties. Similarly, it is equivalent to saying that Muslims do not have any “right to be wrong”. Because of this line of reasoning the Sharia law has served as the foundation of the legal system of all governments that have derived their legitimacy from Islam, such as the Ottoman Empire.

This interpretation results in a contradiction when we look at how Islam treats the Jews and Christians that live in Muslim societies. While actively and aggressively inviting all people to convert to Islam as the only righteous religion, Islam does not force the Jews or Christians to convert to Islam. Nor does it prevent them from practicing the norms of their religion that violate the teachings of Islam (Saliba, 2008). Christians and Jews are allowed to consume alcoholic beverages. Christians are also allowed to consume pork, which is forbidden in Islam. In other words, Islam grants Christians and Jews “the right to be wrong” based on Islamic norms. It also allows them to maintain their own beliefs which disagree with Islamic beliefs on some theological issues (Larson, 2008).

I argue that the “right to be wrong” must be extended to Muslims as well<sup>3</sup>. The reason is that in an Islamic society the rights of Muslims must be either equal to or more than the rights of non-Muslims. The ability to deviate from the core teachings of Islam is a right because compliance with Islamic rules is a limitation that an individual imposes on himself because of his belief or because of the society’s demand. Fasting during the month of Ramadan, for example, is a difficult task that requires discipline. A faithful believer performs this duty as an obligation to Allah (God). Another Muslim who is not interested in fasting might abstain from drinking and eating in public because of social pressure or fear of punishment under Islamic regulations. In these circumstances the ability to bypass the fasting obligation is a right that is available to protected religious minorities (Christians and Jews) but denied to citizens that are identified as Muslims.

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<sup>3</sup> Iranian intellectual theologian Arash Naraghi first presented the concept of the “Right to Be/Do Wrong” in the context of tolerance in Islam in 2011 (Naraghi, 2011), but it has been raised and defended by several Western philosophers such as John Locke, Voltaire, and John Stuart Mill.

If a Christian or a Jew is entitled to hold non-Islamic beliefs and follow a non-Islamic lifestyle, which can be described as the “right to be wrong”, then a Muslim must also enjoy this same right. In other words, since Islam allows non-Muslims to deviate from Islamic norms, it must allow the Muslims to enjoy the same freedom of lifestyle and belief. Otherwise, an Islamic society has offered more social and cultural freedoms to non-Muslims than Muslims, which will violate the “more than or equal rights for Muslims” principle.

Since Islam has granted this right to two non-Muslim groups the same right must be granted to the Muslims as well. Consequently, the concept that all individuals (Muslim and non-Muslim) are entitled to the *Right to be Wrong* can serve as the ethical basis for introduction of civil rights and individual human rights in Islamic societies. These civil rights guarantee that while the state’s duty to religion is to create a hospitable environment for Muslims that wish to practice their faith and follow the Islamic lifestyle, it cannot force a Muslim to practice the Islamic rituals that are defined as obligations to God. At the same time, the concept of *Right to be Wrong* does not entitle individuals to engage in actions that will be harmful to the society or others (such as burglary, murder, ...).

### **Argument Three:**

The third argument for recommendation of democratic institutions for Islamic societies is that democratic institutions can help Islamic countries reduce their economic and military weakness relative to major powers. In the past two centuries (since the 19<sup>th</sup> century) western countries that have successfully transitioned toward democratic political systems have outperformed other countries in economic and military strength. We see the evidence of this development in the rise of Western colonial powers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Among the European colonial powers, the British Empire was not only the most advanced country in science and technology, but also the leading country in transition toward a stable democracy during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The gradual introduction of democratic institutions, and reduction of arbitrary power of absolute monarchy, played an important role in industrial and technological progress of the United Kingdom, and subsequently other European nations (Cox, 2017). The democratic (parliamentary) accountability in these countries resulted in good governance, and approval of policies that were conducive to economic activity and technological progress, which led to the military superiority over the non-Western world. Similar to Great Britain, the emergence of the United States as the dominant superpower of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is partly a result of the democratic political institutions, which resulted in a well-functioning and effective system of governance.

For more than two centuries the Muslim countries of the Middle East have suffered multiple defeats and humiliation in encounters with the Western powers (Hasan, 2012). The authoritarian Islamic empires of the previous centuries, such as the Ottomans were able to achieve military conquests or at least military parity with other civilizations because

their adversaries (such as the European countries before the 19th century,) were also governed by authoritarian rulers (Miller, 1901). Once the European powers adopted more inclusive political institutions, they were able to move ahead of the Ottoman empire in economic wealth and military technology, which enabled them to defeat and occupy the Ottoman empire by the end of World War One.

The European colonial rule has ended but the humiliation of Muslim world (the Middle Eastern countries in particular) has continued in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by its inability to secure a just solution for the Palestinian crisis and prevent the frequent Western military and political interventions in Muslim countries. The Arab world has suffered multiple military defeats in its wars with Israel for more than 80 years. Muslim intellectuals and scholars must ask themselves what the sources of the military supremacy of Israel are. The world's total Jewish population is estimated at 16 million, of which 7.2 million (45%) live in Israel<sup>4</sup>. The key foundational factor that enabled Israel to achieve such remarkable success against its Arab neighbors and Palestinians, is its inclusive and democratic institutions for the Jewish citizens.

An important dimension of these democratic institutions was respect for individual rights on religious beliefs and lifestyle. Even though Israel was created as a homeland and sanctuary for the Jewish people, its founders did not impose the religious norms of Judaism on its Jewish citizens. Nor did they create a religious state in which the constitution guaranteed the enforcement of the Jewish laws and regulations for personal conduct and political governance. Instead, they adopted a democratic constitution which guaranteed equal rights for all Jewish citizens regardless

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<sup>4</sup> Sergio Della Pergola, "Israel's Jewish demography is changing – and with it, so is the Diaspora's", January 10, 2025, Institute for Jewish Policy research, <https://www.jpr.org.uk/insights/israels-jewish-demography-changing-and-it-so-diasporas>. (Cited online May 27, 2025).

of their political belief or observance of Jewish lifestyle. This democratic political system has made a major contribution to the military strength of Israel in several ways.

First, the democratic nature of the government has created a strong sense of patriotism and belonging among the Jewish citizens of Israel (Shafir and Peled, 2002). The disagreement over lifestyle and political issues is very high among Jews both inside and outside of Israel, but no one feels marginalized or alienated. This strong sense of political engagement is demonstrated by the large number of political parties and the continuous emergence of new political or cultural groups. This competitive political environment has resulted in efficiency and efficacy of the Israeli military.

Second, the democratic nature of Israel's political system has resulted in a strong sense of loyalty and goodwill toward Israel by the Jewish populations of other countries, particularly in the United States and major European countries. The American Jews have played a crucial role in the strength of Israel by their powerful lobby (Bayme, 2008). The strong and unconditional support of the United States for Israel is a direct result of the efforts of Jewish Americans whose commitment to Israel is strengthened by the democratic nature of the state in that country. The inclusive political institutions of Israel have encouraged the Jews of other countries to actively participate in Israeli politics with enthusiasm.<sup>5</sup> Many of them even serve in the Israeli military (Yohanani, 2024). Similarly, the Russian Jews that migrated to Israel after the collapse of the Soviet Union have formed an effective lobby to strengthen the Israel-Russia relations for the benefit of Israel.

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<sup>5</sup> "A Portrait of Jewish Americans; Chapter 5: Connection with and Attitudes Toward Israel", Pew Research institute, October 1, 2013, [https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2013/10/01/chapter-5-connection-with-and-attitudes-towards-israel/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2013/10/01/chapter-5-connection-with-and-attitudes-towards-israel/?utm_source=chatgpt.com) , (Online citation date: May 30, 2025) .

Third, Israel's military success is highly dependent on its success in advanced technologies and innovation. This technological success is also closely linked to the democratic nature of the government. The democratic institutions have resulted in a high level of accountability and efficiency in economic policies that facilitate economic and technological progress. Furthermore, since the scientists, technocrats and innovators have faith in the (democratic) legitimacy of the government, they closely cooperate with the military in development of defense industries<sup>6</sup>. There is indeed a high level of synergy between the civilian and military organizations in Israel (Levy 2022). This synergy would not have been possible if the Jewish citizens did not believe in the democratic legitimacy and fairness of their political system.

Similarly, the sense of legitimacy of the state of Israel as a democratic and efficient representative government has created a strong motivation among Jews in other countries to invest in Israel and to assist in transfer of technology and advanced capital goods to that country (Nissim, 2016). There is for example a very strong cooperation among several American high-tech corporations and their Israeli counterparts. The Jewish-Americans have played a crucial role in promotion of these partnerships.

Aside from these case studies on the United States and Israel, a large number of comparative studies in the past fifty years have compared the performance of democratic and non-democratic countries on a large set of economic and political performance indicators. These studies have become possible by the large number of countries that have transitioned into various types of democratic and inclusive political systems after World War Two (Modelski and Perri 2002). We now find democratic countries in all five continents with significant diversity on other

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<sup>6</sup> Several empirical comparative studies, such as (Biddle and Long, 2004), have demonstrated the contribution of democratic institutions to military effectiveness

socioeconomic and cultural dimensions, which allow us to study the impact of democracy on economic and industrial progress in various regions and under different cultures and historical backgrounds.

One category of comparative studies has focused on economic growth and economic stability. In one of these studies Acemoglu et. al. (2019) used a large dataset that tracked the political institutions of 184 countries over fifty years (1960-2010). This dataset included many countries that either transitioned to democracy or retreated in the reverse direction during this interval. Their analysis showed that when countries transitioned to democracy their GDP enjoyed an additional 20% growth in comparison to the Authoritarian status quo.

A second category of comparative studies has looked at the impact of democratic institutions on innovation and technological progress, which is even more relevant for our analysis. Caccio (2020) shows that democratization has a positive impact on invention and spread of innovations in the economy. He also looks deeper into channels that contribute to this causality. Using several indicators of governance in his statistical analysis, he demonstrates that democratization contributes to higher levels of innovation and invention through a) Improving the quality of regulations, b) more effective prevention of corruption, and c) higher commitment to the Rule of law. A similar transmission mechanism from democracy to technological innovation is reported by Zuazu (2019). Furthermore, several studies such as Aghion (2009) have shown that transition to democracy has a more positive effect on innovation in advanced industries as opposed to low-tech industries.

The advocacy of democracy in argument #3 is likely to raise an important criticism that deserves to be addressed. Some critics might argue that in recent years we have seen



several Asian countries that have been able to achieve remarkable economic development and technological progress as authoritarian developmental states<sup>7</sup>. These types of political systems are best exemplified by the experience of China during 1980-2020. Critics might argue that authoritarian countries can bypass democracy and achieve progress and prosperity by imitating the economic policies of the Chinese ruling communist party<sup>8</sup>. I like to offer a response to this criticism.

Several countries such as South Korea and Taiwan have benefited from benevolent authoritarian rulers that have facilitated sustained economic growth. The rising level of education and prosperity in these countries, however, has led to a successful transition to stable democratic political systems in both countries (Kassomeh, 2021). There are also many other examples of transition from a successful authoritarian developmental state to democracy in Latin America and Africa, which suggest that transition to democracy is an inherent result of successful authoritarian governance in most countries. Furthermore, a recent study has demonstrated that in the context of the post-1980 reforms China's political system became more inclusive at the bureaucratic level, which allowed for considerable flow of feedback and criticism in all directions. These inclusive reforms, in combination with performance-oriented incentives for politicians and bureaucrats, played a crucial role in China's economic miracle (Ang, yy. 2018).

The freedom of inquiry and expression, which is an essential component of democracy, can also play an important role in preventing hypocrisy and secret betrayal of public trust by politicians. Consider, for example, a country in which a political leader, that wishes to increase its popularity among devout Muslim citizens, announces an economic sanction against India for

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<sup>7</sup> Some contemporary Islamic thinkers such as **Abul A'lā Maududi** (1903–1979) and **Hasan al-Turabi** (1932–2016) belong to this camp. They advocate for a strong centralized government based on Shari'a.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed account of China's economic reform policies since 1980 see Yuen Yuen Ang (2016).

mistreatment of the Muslim population of Kashmir. In the absence of democratic accountability and freedom of press, this leader might betray the public trust by facilitating secret trade with India. Such a betrayal will be less likely and more costly for a political leader if the press is free and politicians can be removed from power through political elections.

### **Final Words**

The primary argument of this article is that regardless of whether democracy is better or worse than alternative forms of government, one unique interpretation of Quranic teachings demands that predominantly Muslim countries rely on majority electoral support as the source of legitimacy for political leadership. This conclusion is rooted in a Quranic verse that recognizes human beings as the “representatives” or “vice-regents” of God on earth. This assumption automatically grants equal political rights to all human beings, and as long as God does not directly appoint a person as political leader, the burden of selecting the political leaders will fall on his “representatives” which are the citizens of a Muslim country.

It further argues that the respect for people of the Book (Christians and Jews) to follow lifestyles that deviate Islamic restrictions, can be used to advocate for basic civil rights for citizens on issues of lifestyle and beliefs. If drinking alcoholic beverages is forbidden but Christians and Jews are allowed to consume alcohol, Islam allows them “to be wrong” without punishment. The same “right to be wrong” must be granted to Muslims because in an Islamic society the “rights” of Muslims cannot be less than non-Muslims.

My reasoning of these two controversial arguments does not require a belief in the core principles of Islam. Instead, it relies on making sure the political institutions of an

Islamic country are consistent with all the teachings of Quran and Islamic Traditions (*the Hadith*). In presenting these arguments, I acknowledge my preference for democracy as a preferred system of political governance, which is compatible with the universal principles of justice and equal political rights. My first two arguments are simply an attempt to find support for democracy from within the teachings of Islam. In my third argument I have tried to demonstrate that democracy not only is consistent with principles of Islam and universal Justice, but it is also an important instrument for economic and technological empowerment of predominantly Muslim countries.

If the Muslim countries wish to reduce their technological and military gap with Israel, the Western powers, and the emerging Asian powers (India and China), they have no alternative but to adopt inclusive political institutions and improve the efficiency and responsiveness of their collective decision-making institutions. The political elite in most Islamic countries are aware that the community of nations are engaged in a technological arms race against each other. The countries that fall behind in this race will be at risk of defeat, and marginalization. What is less understood by the scholars and political elite of the Muslim countries, however, is that the global community is also engaged in an institutional and organizational arms race. No nation or community of nations has the luxury of selecting its political system in isolation, solely based on its historic, religious or cultural roots. If one country adopts a more effective political system that enables it to speed up its technological development and achieve faster economic growth, all other nations that wish to remain in the race have no choice but to reform their political institutions accordingly.

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