



CRITICAL REVIEW

# The concept of religious democracy as a new political philosophy for countries with Moslem predominant

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**Abstract.** This brief study aims at proposing an alternative concept of democracy, i.e., Religious democracy, which may have relevancies for most countries with a Muslim predominant. It is a qualitative study based on existing literature and scholarly work. The findings argue that Islam as a universal religion may have approval to this new concept because Islam offers two perspectives or philosophical ideas, i.e., universal values such as freedom, brotherhood, equality, etc., and particular forms as a formulation towards those values in articulating or socializing Islamic values in either political, economic, social or cultural area, especially among Muslim communities. Thus, Islam as a religion may accommodate the concept of democracy in terms of the context of a subjective democracy, not an objective one. This study has offered useful insights and implications for the countries with Muslim predominant.

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## INTRODUCTION

Historically, the concept of democracy began with political traditions in the classic Greek period, in which it was first investigated by a famous philosopher, Plato. The primary contents of a democracy is a natural effort to accommodate the vote of the people in the best way (Lindberg, et al., 2014, Fukuyama, 2013). The concept of democracy, as seen in the United States of America and Western Europe, emerges as a form of liberalism that takes its root from liberal theorists such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Voltaire and others (Adler, 1990; Gearhart, 1980; Honigsheim, 1952; Locke and Laslett, 1988; Sabine, 1952; Scott, 1992; Wade, 1976). The concept aims at glorifying people or citizenry as the sole owner of an actual sovereignty, which is implemented by a delegation system, alongside liberty imposed in the economics, which later creates capitalism and colonialism (Zainuddin, 1992, 154).

Etymologically, the term “democracy” first comes from the Greek words *demos*, which means “the people”, and *kratein* or *kratos*, which means “power” (Ober, 2008). In short, democracy refers to a form of government by the people,

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of the people and for the people (Ober, 2009). Besides, democracy is a form of governance that is considerably better than either an absolute government, oligarchy, fascism, or other forms, which obviously do not appreciate human values (Linz, 2006; Merkl, 1981; Mosley, 2003; Raaflaub, 1983; Rose *et al.*, 1998; Zainuddin, 1992, 73).

At its conceptual level, the whole form of democracy is similar, but there are differences in its practices. During its development, the concept of democracy has been diverging into a variety of terms, e.g. social democracy, liberal democracy, people democracy, guided democracy and others. However, prior studies have made an emphasis to distinguish democracy into two general categories, i.e. based on independence and similarity (Held, 2006; Huntington, 1984; Jalal, 1995; Rokkan, 1968; Vanhanen, 1997; Zainuddin, 1992, 74). From a structural point of view, the political system of democracy is an ideal system that keeps a balance between conflicts and consensus (Diamond, 1990; Horowitz, 1962; McClosky *et al.*, 1960; Oneal and Russett, 1997). In fact, democracy have philosophically enabled different opinions, rivalries, and controversies between either individuals, multiple groups, an individual and a group, an individual and the government, a group and the government, or governmental institutions.

In its nature, democracy promotes the infamous thought *vox populi, vox dei*, which implies that “the voice of the people [is] the voice of God.” Besides, as the term of democracy first comes from the Greek phrase *demokratia*, it proposes a particular meaning of a cogitation by the people, which is initially constituted in Athens, the capital city of ancient Greece, during the fifth and fourth century BC. However, the model of democracy in the city of Athens is criticized by Plato and Aristoteles (Rais, 1986, 9). Despite having criticized and assumed dangerous by these influencing political thinkers, the democratic political system of Athens have some interesting principles to be observed, including the directly involvement of citizenry in establishing a political decision. In fact, it may have promoted political and law equalities for all citizenries. It has offered an assured political authorship and civilization for all the people, and has reenacted the voting and balloting system to understand the aspiration of all the people (Rais, 1986, 9-11). To make a firm foundation for a critical review, this study takes the view of Soroush (2000, 195) on democracy due to its interesting and cautious argument. It states:

*“A separation of authority, a study on responsibilities for general citizen, independent and autonomous press, a freedom of expression, and a council of deliberation on the various level of decision makers, political parties, general election and parliament is a set of methods to achieve and establish a democracy.”*

In fact, there are some views regarding the relationship between democracy and religion within the circle of Muslim thinkers (Al-Hibri, 1992; Arkoun, 2002; Enayat, 2005; Fattah, 2006; Kurzman, 2001; Mahmood, 2006; Rizzo *et al.*, 2007; Sachedina, 2001). In general, those views are distinguished into three, i.e. those who totally refuse democracy, those who clearly support a pure democracy (nationalist- secular), and those who moderately try to integrate the concept of democracy and religious values. In particular, the preceding research of this study has found that Soroush (2000) is included into the third group (Azhar, 1996, 58-62).

### A Dialectics Between Islam and Democracy

Within an Islamic context, the fundamental spirits of musyawarah (consensus) and munazharah (debate, discussion) have a substantial similarity with the concept of democracy, in which during the golden era of Islam they have created the principal of a freedom thinking. If the Islam world has a desire to reawaken the freedom principal, the tradition of thinking in Islam therefore needs to get re-alive. In fact,

science prodigies such as Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina are products from the thinking tradition during their own time (Burrell, 1988; Fackenheim, 1946; Gohlman, 1974; Netton, 1999; Rescher, 1962). Historically, Islamic perception has a root from the revelation. The revelation has two dimension, i.e. transcendental, which is Allah's decrees that can be interfered, and second dimension, which enables the decrees to be interpreted. Then, human process it when they conduct an interpretation while reciting al-Qur'an. Hence, they may produce a variety of the fixed opening to a single way (Republika, 2000, 14 April, 11).

Furthermore, the logic of democracy, which naturally contains an irresolute internal standpoint of similarity, liberty, pro-citizen, the existence of a delegation system, social justice and a just economy, and the management of conflicts as well as consensus through democratic mechanisms, is respected as a more secular- humanistic approach by the majority of political thinkers, including those among Muslim scholars. However, if it is considered in a histories-academic discourse, the presence of "Islam" and "Western" actually have many similarities in terms of intellectual and spiritual experiences in Mediterranean area as the center of meeting points between "Islam" and the "Western" world. It has been the place where early civilizations have enabled themselves to develop the principals of humanism, democracy, munazharah, and shura (consultation). The fundamental core of democracy and shura is in fact similar, while the form and procedural mechanisms may historically differ. The unsure standpoint of similarity between shura and the democracy, alongside a widening distance between "Islam" and "Western" may have shifted to sheer of even closer as an effect of the development of a variety of literature during the Middle Age that have introduced numerous ideological-theocratic characters.

As an alternative of the historical dichotomy, the current critical review attempts to propose the concept of a religious democracy, which is neither merely a pure democracy (non-spiritual) nor refuse the whole democracy (anti-democracy). As an idiom being proposed, democracy requires a development not in terms of an objective means (objective democracy), but needs an intentionally development to more promoting a subjective character (subjective democracy). Then, the revival of subjective democracy values (a local democracy) will improve the progressiveness quality and autonomy of humankind in facing challenges in the contemporary world. The meeting between "Islam" and "Western" will hence suppress Islam's self-isolation that exist within either the Western world or in the Moslem land.

Held (2007) has suggested the recent dynamics from the concept of democracy that requires a renewed view by the Islam world. In the 20th century, the theory of democracy is quite related to the organization and dynamics of a social economy, in which democratic procedures, including the

implications on public regulations, are formulated by the majority of citizens within a country. Another focus of a modern democracy is related with the supporting and inhibiting aspects within a country. Thus, the destiny of a nation is entirely directed by the nation itself. As an example, the experience of an oppressed Palestine by the power of imperialism and colonialism brought by Israel may have occurred because there have been no whole internal cohesiveness within the Palestine nation itself, which have in fact appeared in the form of an internal disintegration delegated by Fatah or Hamas. Thus, the following statement (Held, 2007, 340) gets its critical importance:

*“... a nation has a control above its own destiny. Only by being loyal to the collective agreement, a nation must make and bound the power that is burdened by executives and governmental institutions in power, which work in a territorial liability along with the agents and representative of government and other countries.”*

### **THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DEMOCRACY IN THE MOSLEM WORLD**

Some of Moslem countries that have naturally succeeded in developing their own democratization largely settle with the context of internal politics in each country. For example, Turkey that has achieved a success with its Justice Party (theo-social democracy), Iran with its theo-democratic characters (wilayah al-Faqih), Malaysia that have relatively been close enough to the process of a modernized democracy (UMNO vs. oppositions), Aljazair, Tunisia and Egypt. In particular, Egypt have lately turned back to a militaristic authoritarianism (moderate and liberal Moslem vs. radical Islamic brotherhood). Besides, Iraq and Syria have been quite busy with their internal conflicts between Sunni and Shia despite having an existing power (armed militia) on the new government's side. On the other hand, there are also Pakistan, Afghanistan, Moro in the Philippines, Pattani in Thailand, Moslem in Ukraine, and several other countries that are currently in the process of self- emancipation to go into the next shift of democratization.

In a particular focus on Indonesia, the context of the development of democracy in the country has witnessed a procedural move that has been going sufficient in which since 1998, especially in 2004, the advancement of democratic procedures is formally signed through direct parliamentary and presidential elections. To date, general elections are considerably taken in a good term. The country has in fact received credits from international audience, which state that Indonesia has been successful to integrate Islam and democracy. In particular, Indonesia has passed two critical steps of a democratization: taking down an authoritarian regime and the amendments of UUD 1945 (Indonesian Constitution). Still, in a substantive manner Indonesia is currently a new entity to enter next democratic steps with a proper behavior, in which at this moment, the culturally way of democracy in Indonesia is largely perceived with money politics (in Bahasa: “wani piro”) and black campaign.

However, there are some new hopes to cope with a more democratic culture, which may have been gradually shifting to a growing opinion on the necessity of a presidential candidate who wants to hear the aspiration of common people, to distribute several social security programs, e.g. Kartu Indonesia Pintar (Indonesian Smart Card) and Kartu Indonesia Sehat (Indonesian Health Card), to conduct a mental revolution by fulfilling akhlaq (practices of virtue and

morality) education to the students of elementary schools, to utilize drones (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles-UAVS) to defend area under Indonesian jurisdiction, to develop a “tol laut” (sea toll) by providing dedicated tanker ships to support the logistics and supply chain of critical commodities and human necessities (e.g. carrying imported rice to South Sulawesi, cows from Nusa Tenggara Timur to Jakarta, etc.), and to improve the wealth of teachers and lecturers through a certification program. On the other hand, there is currently a strong challenge for the development of democracy in Indonesia, which implies that political aura in the country is shaded by religious formalities rather than an orientation on humanity values. Islamic political jargons are still normative rather than applicative and problem solving. In fact, a numerous figures from religious parties have been caught to conduct corruption, polygamy, and may have lacked of Islamic political strategy, which is merely designed when it has come close to an election. Another weakness of Islamic parties is their lack of populist figures, including an excessive luxurious lifestyle of their leaders. Besides, political coalitions are currently dominated by a horse-trading politics (in Bahasa: “dagang sapi”). In fact, Moslem in the parliament are also repeatedly involved with several political misconducts in polishing national/regional budgets (APBN/APBD). Later, the latest presidential election has become an interesting phenomenon due to the fact that it is the first presidential election with only two candidates in the country, in which one of them does in fact not come from a leadership position of any political party. Then, there is an emerging opinion about a “slight coalition”, in which there should be an auction of ministerial offices and the commitment of presidential candidates toward promises made by the KPK (The Commission for Corruption Eradication - Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi). In addition, the 2014 general election 2014 has also been marked by the existence of spirit to not pulling and debating any cultural and political dichotomy between Java vs. non-Java, civil vs. military, etc.

### THE FUTURE OF RELIGIOUS DEMOCRACY

Considering the variety of internal and external conditions of each Moslem, there is a need to offer the philosophy of a religious democracy, which is different to the concept of either liberal or socialist democracy. To further promote the alternative democracy, these following points need to be discussed:

1. Al-Qur’an and Sunnah as sources of democratic values
2. Al-Qur’an is a reference of normative-philosophical understanding for developing democratic values within the Islamic world. The values may cover values of divinity, humanity, nature, brotherhood, goodness, wisdom, etc. There is also an interpretation of a biased democracy conducted through an effort of contextualization.
3. Al-Qur’an and Sunnah as metaphorical sources (mythical–majazy), or a set of sign- signal-symbol
4. The openness of Islamic texts, meaning that there is no final product of the texts
5. The interplay between textual and contextual understanding
6. Islamic humanism
7. Islamic criticism

8. Moslem as an actor and spectator
9. Religious democracy: normativity and historicity
10. From Ahl al-Kitab to the People of the Book
11. New logo-centrism
12. The interplay between texts and meanings
13. A system of means within the society
14. An interconnection between history, thoughts and language
15. The potential of local wisdom
16. New approaches of religious understanding, including dogmatic, doctrinal, apologetic, theological, scriptural, textual, and bayani ones.

Within the framework to realize an ideal relation between country and religion in the future, it is important to establish a vibrant effort to actualize some general principles of the religious democracy concept. In the Soroush's perspective, the concept of democracy is basically distinguished into two distinct ideas, i.e. liberal and socialist democracies. In fact, as Soroush (2000, 117) has stated, "in a secular society culture, the government acts like no-God, all political planning are only supposed to fulfill human satisfaction." In particular, the current political system of democracy is naturally different with the religious leadership systems of Catholic Pope or Khalifah, in which both of them offer political life of mankind or society as only for-God. Hence, a religious democracy is naturally two distinct matters that may stand together (Soroush, 2000, 200).

Furthermore, Soroush has also revealed a probability for Islam society to make a single standing point between political lives of democracy with a devotion to the God's existence. It may, however, feel hard to realize. The difficulty may emerge due to three matters: First, there is a need to realize a harmony between people's vote with God's blessing; second, there is a need to understand how to realize a uniformity between religion and non-religion; and third, there is a need to actualize how government may have an action right towards the people and the God at the same time. To this extent, Moslem thinkers or democrats infrequently conduct scholarly discourses to learn the God's rights related to the human rights (Soroush, 2000, 178-182).

Next, there is a natural meeting point or similarity of values, whether in religion or beyond religion, such as the values of rightness, justness, humanity, public responsibility, etc. However, studies on the efforts to actualize the values requires an existence of rational arguments, humane, and non-religion. There is also a pre-condition for materialized a religious democratic system, including the need of a more detailed historical data and collective logical reasoning (public participation), not individual ones (Soroush, 2000, 185). According to those explanations, there are critical points to be established within a political or social system that implements a religious democracy, i.e.:

1. There is a harmony between the rights and blessing of God and the human rights.
2. Establishment of a citizenship, which is tolerant, appreciate plurality, no truth claim, and far from an attitude of ethnocentrism (racist), sectarian and discriminative.
3. The importance of rationalists in any interpretation over religious texts<sup>2</sup>.
4. The importance of a separation between religious and political affairs; however, the process of political live is substantially controlled by

religious values. In contrast, ongoing political system has to accommodate objective religious values.

5. Objectification of religious values with a justified character, right and humanist.
6. Having a commitment towards the concept of citizen safety and prosperity.
7. No-violent in all struggles of either personal or group aspirations. Picking more than one route for parliamentary and constitutional expressions.
8. Having an independent character by still being responsible.
9. Setting out religiousness substances, not religious formalities.
10. The important of convergence between intellect logical reasoning and vision from the God continuously

Looking at those discussions, democracy may need to be philosophically and conceptually understood as having two concepts: either an objective democracy (vox populi, vox dei) or subjective democracy. They have stood in a line with prior certain concepts, e.g. liberal democracy, social democracy, direct democracy, the Pancasila democracy and the proposed religious democracy concept.

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

***From ummah to citizenship.*** To establish a religious democracy in the future of the Islam world, there is a need of the transformation from an ummah to the concept of citizenship. The ummah concept may have been more suitable to the internal-exclusive characters of Islam, while citizenship is an extension from an ummah concept from an internal-exclusive citizenship view to a plural citizen (nation citizen) in a more external-inclusive way. The subjectivity of a citizenship then requires a shift to include a wider objectivity of nationality and citizenship.

***Shifting the concept of Islamization towards more substantive Islamic values.*** It is related to several issues, including how to end the poor society, etc. In other words, the concept of Islamization proposes a more formalistic character, while the substance of Islamization values include more intrinsic characters in all facets of the life of all citizen.

***Creating a local khilafah (good governance and good government).*** In recent developments, the concept of khilafah tends to promote a more romantic-utopist character rather than a realistic-futuristic one. Therefore, a most real situation may need to confront the Islamic concept with democracy through the realization of religious texts regarding a local khilafah (good governance and good government), particularly ones related to governmental regulations, infrastructure maintenance and human resources development in a specific country.

***From a universal shari'a to an implementative and contextualized one.*** Some Islam scholars, including as-Syhatibi, Fazlur Rahman, Abdullahi Ahmed an-Na'im, Khalid Abou el-Fadl, Jasser Auda, etc., have proposed opinions and thoughts on the contextualization of shari'a. It considerably a good proposal for being applied in countries with Moselm predominant, which desire to have democracy in a more rational-substantive way. In general, shari'a is more universal (kulliyah) while its contextualization and implementation is more technical and bureaucratic (fihiyyah) adapted to the dynamics within a country without underestimating universal shari'a values.

**Subjective religious values to objective ones.** In the perspective of Kuntowijoyo (1991; 1997; 2001), the subjective values of a religion are clearly transformable to be a canon collection or objective fihiyyah regulation, hence these values can be accepted by all citizens including the followers of other religions.

**From normative texts (Qur'an and Sunna) to the positive law or constitution.** Resembling the abovementioned point, challenges faced by Moslem countries in the future may relate to how to derive normative al-Qur'an and Sunna texts to be a rational and modern law or constitution. Besides, the future challenge may have triggered a proposal to "secularizing Islam".

**Minimizing a forceful implementation of shar'ia.** It would significantly avoid situations currently occur in several countries (Saudi Arabia, Iran, Malaysia, etc.) and regions (South of Sudan, Aceh in Indonesia, etc.) that attempt to coerce shari'a programs (Islamic tourism, jilbabers, hotel free alcohol, halal food, shari'a banking, etc.) over all citizens but overlook substantive shari'a. Those programs are in fact good, but the implementation is not.

Wallahu a'lam bisshawab.

#### LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has some limitations and calls for further research in future. The study was limited in scope and covered a brief section of democracy, specifically religious democracy. Hence, more work ought to be done in this domain to get better findings.

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— This article does not have any appendix. —