

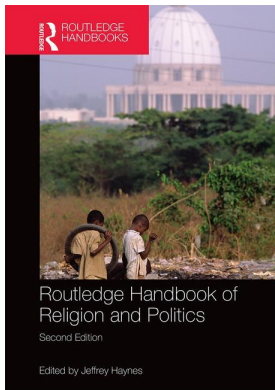
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Jeffrey Haynes

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11

RELIGION AND THE ‘THIRD WAVE OF DEMOCRACY’

Jeffrey Haynes

LONDON METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY, UK

Until fairly recently, there were few democratically elected governments outside Western Europe and North America. Instead, such countries had various kinds of authoritarian regimes – including, military, one-party, no-party and personalist dictatorships. However, during the 1980s and 1990s, the shift from unelected to elected governments was deemed so significant that Huntington (1991) gave it a name: the ‘third wave of democracy’.¹ The third wave was a fundamental, near universal, shift in governance arrangements which occurred between the mid-1970s and early 2000s. As a result, Waylen noted a decade ago, ‘competitive electoral politics is now being conducted in a record number of countries’.² A key focus in this regard was to try to explain the varied democratisation outcomes which occurred as a result of the third wave. Many analyses point to the importance primarily of internal factors, although external considerations are also widely noted. My aim in this chapter is to examine interactions between key religious and political actors in the context of the third wave of democracy. I focus upon Turkey, an example of a strongly Muslim country that shifted from authoritarian rule to democratic rule during the third wave, and the role of selected Christian churches in several Sub-Saharan African countries during the same period. My overall purpose is to compare and contrast how ‘Islamic’ and ‘Christian’ actors engaged with democratisation during the third wave in two previously undemocratic contexts: Turkey and Sub-Saharan Africa.

The third wave of democracy

The third wave of democracy followed two earlier ‘waves’. The first took place during much of the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth century, when various European and North American countries democratised. The second began directly after World War II, when several countries, including Italy, Japan and West Germany, moved decisively from authoritarian to democratic rule, strongly encouraged by the government of the United States. Both of these waves of democracy were followed by reverse waves, away from democracy.

The third wave of democracy began in the mid-1970s with democratisation in three southern European countries – Greece, Portugal and Spain. In the 1980s and 1990s, numerous authoritarian regimes in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa underwent shifts from authoritarian rule. The extent of these changes is demonstrated by the fact that in 1972 only a quarter of countries had democratically elected governments. Twenty years

later, the proportion had grown to over 50 per cent and by 2002, 75 per cent of the world's 192 countries had elected governments with at least some significantly democratic characteristics. The situation between 1972 and 2015 is summarised in Table 11.1.

The table indicates that the number of 'free countries' – that is, those commonly regarded as having most 'democratic' characteristics – reached a high point in 2002. Since then the number of 'partly free' countries – that is, countries with *some* democratic characteristics – has remained almost static (from 56 to 55) while the number of 'not free' countries (no or very few discernible democratic characteristics) has grown (from 47 to 51). In the next section, I survey briefly the theoretical assumptions behind transitions from authoritarian to more democratic governments, before introducing the topic of religion's involvement in this process. I then assess the role of selected Islamic and Christian actors, respectively, in the democratisation process in Turkey and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Explaining the shift from authoritarian to democratic rule

Democratisation is a process that can occur in four stages: (1) political liberalisation, (2) collapse of authoritarian regime, (3) democratic transition and (4) democratisation consolidation. *Political liberalisation* is the process of reforming authoritarian rule. *Collapse of the authoritarian regime* refers to the stage when a dictatorship falls apart. *Democratic transition* is the material shift to democracy, commonly marked by the democratic election of a new government. *Democratic consolidation* is the process of embedding both democratic institutions and perceptions among both elites and citizens that democracy is the best way of 'doing' politics.

The four stages are complementary and can overlap. For example, political liberalisation and transition can happen simultaneously, while aspects of democratic consolidation can appear when certain elements of transition are barely in place or remain incomplete. Or they may even be showing signs of retreating. On the other hand, it is nearly always possible to observe a concluded transition to democracy. This is when a pattern of behaviour developed *ad hoc* during the stage of regime change becomes institutionalised, characterised by admittance of political actors into the system – as well as the process of political decision-making – according to previously established and legitimately coded procedures.

Until then, absence of or uncertainty about these accepted 'rules of the democratic game' make it difficult to be sure about the eventual outcome of political transitions. This is because the transition dynamics revolve around strategic interactions and tentative arrangements

Table 11.1 'Free', 'partly free' and 'not free' countries, 1972–2015

	Number of 'free' countries	Number of 'partly free' countries	Number of 'not free' countries
1972	43	38	69
1982	54	47	64
1992	75	73	38
2002	89	56	47
2007	89	59	44
2015	89	55	51

Source: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=372> and https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2015?gclid=CLG6y__Y5sUCFSLKtAodvUsA0Q#.VWg5C2fbKUI.

Note: The terms 'free', 'partly free' and 'not free' correspond respectively to the terms used in this book: established democracy, transitional democracy, and non-democracy.

between actors with uncertain power resources. Key issues include: (1) defining who is legitimately entitled to play the political 'game', (2) the criteria determining who wins and loses politically, and (3) the limits to be placed on the issues at stake. What chiefly differentiates the four stages of democratisation is the degree of uncertainty prevailing at each moment. For example, during regime transition *all* political calculations and interactions are highly uncertain. This is because political actors find it difficult to know: (1) what their precise interests are and (2) which groups and individuals would most usefully be allies or opponents.

During transition, powerful, often inherently undemocratic, political players, such as the armed forces and/or elite civilian supporters of the exiting authoritarian regime, characteristically divide into what Huntington calls 'hard-line' and 'soft-line' factions.³ 'Soft-liners' are relatively willing to achieve negotiated solutions to the political problems, while 'hard-liners' are unwilling to arrive at solutions reflecting compromise between polarised positions. Democratic consolidation is most likely when soft-liners triumph because, unlike hard-liners, they are willing to find a compromise solution.

A consolidated democracy is often said to be in place when political elites, political groups and the mass of ordinary people accept the formal rules and informal understandings that determine political outcomes: that is, 'who gets what, where, when and how'. If achieved, it signifies that groups are settling into relatively predictable positions involving politically legitimate behaviour according to generally acceptable rules. More generally, a consolidated democracy is characterised by normative limits and established patterns of power distribution. Political parties emerge as privileged in this context because, despite their divisions over strategies and their uncertainties about partisan identities, the logic of electoral competition focuses public attention on them and compels them to appeal to the widest possible clientele. In addition, 'strong' civil societies are thought to be crucial for democratic consolidation, in part because they can help keep an eye on the state and what it does with its power. In sum, democratic consolidation is said to be present when all major political actors take for granted the fact that democratic processes dictate governmental renewal.⁴

Observers have also noted that, despite numerous relatively free and fair elections over the last two decades in many formerly authoritarian countries, in most cases ordinary people continue to lack ability to influence political outcomes.⁵ This may be because small groups of elites – whether, civilians, military personnel, or a combination – not only control national political processes but also manage more widely to dictate political conditions.⁶ Under such conditions, because power is still focused in relatively few elite hands, political systems have narrow bases from which most ordinary people are, or feel, excluded. This can be problematic because, by definition, a democracy should not be run by and for the few, but should signify popularly elected government operating in the broad public interest.

In sum, during the third wave of democracy, increased numbers of governments came to power via the ballot box – yet not all of them have strong democratic credentials.

Islam and democratisation in the Middle East

The issue of political pluralism in the 'Islamic world', especially among the Arab countries of the Middle East, is a defining theme of much recent research on democratisation. The issue was of course given a fillip by the recent Arab Spring events but, given that only Tunisia appears to have undertaken a consistent democratisation, then it is not appropriate to include the Arab Spring events in an overall assessment of democratisation in the region.⁷ Of more consistent focus has been the issue of the relationship between 'Islam' and 'democracy'. Does the former significantly or fatally inhibit the likelihood of the latter? Many scholars work from

one of two premises: (1) there is nothing 'inherent' in Islam that means that Muslim countries will 'inevitably' lack democratic credentials, or (2) there is something 'inherent' in Islam that means that Muslim countries will 'inevitably' lack democratic credentials.

On the one hand, it is widely asserted not only that many Muslim countries have few structural characteristics conducive to both democratisation and democracy but also that this is how things have been for a long time. This situation did not widely change among the Muslim countries during the two decades of the third wave of democracy, from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s, or as a result of the Arab Spring.⁸ On the other hand, Muslim-majority countries around the world – of which there are more than forty, from Morocco in the west to Indonesia in the east, collectively home to more than a billion people – do not comprise an unchanging, undemocratic monolith. This is also a key theme of many recent works on the topic of democratisation and democracy in the Muslim world, a focus that also stresses that to understand why some countries in the Muslim world have democratised while others have not, we need to look for explanations to both internal and external factors, and their interactions.

In the Middle East, the region perhaps most commonly associated with the theory and practice of 'Muslim government' or 'government by Muslims', we can note three periods, encompassing a period of around 120 years, of often profound political changes: the 1860s to 1930s; late 1950s to early 1960s; and the 1970s to 1990s. The first phase was characterised by significant political changes in the region that occurred under Ottoman (Turkish) colonial rule, the imperial cement that quickly dissolved at the end of World War I. From the 1860s to the 1930s, national assemblies were created in a number of countries in North Africa and in the Arabian Peninsula. After Ottoman rule collapsed in the aftermath of World War I, parliamentary regimes were created under mandated British or French rule, reflecting the aegis of the League of Nations, in a number of regional countries, including: Egypt (1924–58), Iraq (1936–58) and Lebanon (1946–75). Second, in the late 1950s and early 1960s there was a further period of significant political amendments in the region. Within the space of a few years, radical, often junior, army officers overthrew conservative governments in four key regional countries: Egypt, Iraq, Libya and Syria. Their common goal was to oust what they regarded as unacceptably unrepresentative governments, widely regarded as unforgivably subservient to Western countries, especially the governments of Britain and the USA. However, over time, it became clear that the new rulers had no intention of democratising their political systems along lines familiar to Western governments and voters. Instead, they installed authoritarian or totalitarian regimes, with the political role of the armed forces well to the fore, and sometimes modelled on the communist governments of the Soviet bloc. Despite their differing political characteristics, they were all regimes with few if any conventional attributes of democracy, beyond regular, albeit heavily controlled, elections.

Third, while the third wave of democracy (mid-1970s to early 2000s) was not overall a time of profound political change in the Muslim and Arab world, some Muslim countries, notably Turkey (98 per cent Muslim) and Indonesia (88 per cent Muslim), did emerge from authoritarian rule to establish at least partially democratic systems during this time. Turkey has now been a 'functioning democracy' since 1983, with a strong – albeit unfulfilled – case for membership of the European Union.⁹ Indonesia emerged in 1998 from three decades of personalist rule under General Suharto and since then the country has gradually developed a flawed yet recognisably democratic system.¹⁰ In addition, we can also note a number of other Muslim-majority countries – such as, Kuwait (85 per cent Muslim), Jordan (92 per cent) and Morocco (99 per cent) – that embarked on, sometimes stalled, political liberalisation and/or democratisation. Each began an unfinished democratisation process that appeared to denote aspirational moves towards more democratic politics.

However, despite political liberalisation/democratisation among a small but not insignificant group of Muslim-majority countries, much conventional wisdom would insist that the great majority of Muslim countries should be characterised in two general ways. First, the governments of many (most) Muslim-majority countries seem to resist democracy. Second, many such governments also seem to have relatively little respect for citizens' human rights. However, while various kinds of authoritarian regimes are still the norm among such countries, many observers, including Fuller, would agree that this situation is primarily the outcome of various historical and structural characteristics.¹¹ These include:

- *Political systems headed by personalistic leaders.* Typically, in the Muslim world such rulers preside over very hierarchical, centralised states. In many cases, the extant political system depends on top-down power and as a result rulers are most unwilling to devolve any real power to other political institutions – if they meaningfully exist, which is often not the case.
- *Politically significant militaries.* Military men quite rightly see it as their job to protect the state from attack from within and without. Among Muslim polities, there are significant examples of armies that exist primarily to thwart challenges for political control from groups wishing to change the political status quo via rebellion or revolution.
- *Weak and fragmented civil societies.* Civil societies in Muslim countries are often weak and fragmented; as a result, they do not present a challenge to incumbent governments to encourage them to amend undemocratic behaviour.
- *The cultural and religious hegemony of Islam.* Islam is often said to be a religious system that is not beneficial to democratisation. In the Middle East, the regional ubiquity and socio-political significance of Islam – the dominant religion in all regional countries with the clear exception of Israel and debatable exemption of Lebanon – is said to help explain not only the authoritarian nature of most governing regimes in the region but also significantly to account for political cultures of repression and passivity that are antithetical to democratic citizenship.¹²

As Fattah notes, '[t]here is no question that Muslim countries are disproportionately auto-cratonic . . . no single Muslim country qualifies today as a consolidated democracy . . .'¹³ On the other hand, others emphasise the point we made earlier: potentially or actually significant political changes are beginning to take place in the many parts of the Muslim world, including the Middle East region. Political elites in various regional countries – including, Turkey, Kuwait and Jordan – are now to varying degrees engaged in political liberalisation or democratisation.¹⁴

According to Fattah, 'three predominant worldviews' within the Muslim world influence 'religion and governance: traditionalist Islamists, modernist Islamists, and secularists'.¹⁵ Traditionalists believe that they are the keepers of the Islamic traditions. It should be noted, however, that there are various kinds of 'traditionalist Islamists'. Some propose (and/or practise) armed struggle to wrest power from governments that are seen to be ruling in un-Islamic way, such as al Qaeda; some believe in incrementalist change through the ballot box, such as the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria in the early 1990s; some seek to achieve their goals by way of a combination of extra-parliamentary struggle, societal proselytisation and governmental lobbying, including the Muslim Brotherhoods of various Middle Eastern countries, including Egypt and Jordan. But despite differences in strategy and tactics, such entities have two beliefs in common: (1) politics and religion are inseparable; and (2) *sharia* law should ideally be applied to all Muslims. Many also share a third concern: Muslims as a group are the

focal point of a conspiracy involving Zionists and Western imperialists aiming to take over Muslim-owned lands and resources (notably oil). Such a concern is underlined by American transnational corporations' control over Arab oil, as well as by Israel's implacable denial of political and civil rights for its (largely Muslim) Palestinian constituency. In sum, traditionalist Islamists believe that for something to be 'Islamic' it must be accepted by both *sharia* and *ulama* (Muslim clerics) and 'Western-style' – that is, liberal – democracy is anti- or un-Islamic.

Modernist Islamists believe that 'Muslims can learn about anything they believe is good for themselves and society regardless of its origins'.¹⁶ In other words, unlike traditionalist Islamists, modernist Islamists do not reject (liberal) democracy *per se* as they do not find either ethical or religious problems with adoption of such democratic mechanisms – as long as they are generally appropriate to Muslim beliefs. They base their acceptance on two factors: first, early Muslims adopted non-Islamic innovations and, second, democracy is not a Western invention and as a result it can be Islamised. In sum, for modernist Islamists, for something to be Islamic it must not contradict the *sharia*, while (liberal) democracy is Islamic or at least 'Islamisable'.

Finally, there are the (Muslim) secularists who start from two assumptions. First, Islam does not offer a *concrete* guide for governance, that is, Muslim holy texts do not tell Muslims explicitly how to run their societies, especially in the twenty-first century, a period marked by profound and continuing economic, cultural and social changes. While holy texts, including the Qur'an, are valuable sources of ethics and morality they are not much help in running political or economic systems at the current time. The second assumption is that Muslims need to follow what the most successful societies have done in order to outdo them. This is said to be exactly what the West did in the past by learning from Muslims and others. For secularist Muslims, for something to be Islamic it should be in the interest of society quite regardless of holy texts. In addition, democracy is widely regarded among secularists as necessary in order to provide representative, legitimate and authoritative governments in Muslim countries. In sum, there are various positions regarding (liberal) democracy within current Islamic thinking and nothing suggests that 'Islam' is inherently anti-(liberal) democracy. In the next section, we see how Turkey has engaged with the issue of democracy over the last thirty years or so, during which the country significantly democratised.

Turkey

Turkey has a population of around 75 million people, of whom more than 80 per cent are ethnically Turkish. There are also a number of minority peoples, including Kurds, an issue which has periodically informed the nature of the country's politics. Ninety-eight per cent of the population is Muslim, and Islam maintains a strong social and political position despite the secular emphasis of state policy since the founding of the post-Ottoman Turkish republic in the early 1920s. In recent years, demands for 'more Islam' in public life has conflicted with the country's strongly pro-secular orientation laid down nearly a century ago by the founder of the Turkish republic, Kemal Atatürk.

Political culture and regime legitimacy

Turkey is actually a second- rather than third-wave democracy, having first democratised in 1950. However, the country was taken over by the military three times – in 1960, 1971 and 1980 – before the latest round of democracy, which began in 1983. Between the early 1970s and the late 1990s, Turkey fluctuated between being a 'free' and a 'partly free' country (in

2015, Turkey was rated by Freedom House as ‘partly free’).¹⁷ Over the last three decades, the position of both political rights and civil liberties has fluctuated. This situation is often linked to the traditionally important political role of the armed forces which, for decades, has sought to control the country’s political development in a strongly secular direction. Overall, the armed forces have been the country’s most important political institution since the fall of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, eclipsing underdeveloped political institutions, such as the increasingly fragmented party system.

The most recent transition from military rule in 1983 exemplified the degree to which outgoing military regime in Turkey set the terms of their departure from power. Post-1983 constitutional amendments eradicated some legacies of military rule, including the ban on political activity by former politicians and on cooperation between political parties and civil society organisations, including trade unions and professional organisations. In addition, other constitutional exit guarantees, such as the president’s power to block constitutional amendments, automatically expired in 1989. On the other hand, the progress of civilianisation – and hence democratic consolidation after 1983 – arguably had less to do with formal constitutional change than with informal practice and adaptation. The point is that three decades after the onset of the current phase of democratisation, the military retains high political salience in Turkey. In sum, the long term structural effect of military domination has influenced the country’s political culture, making it problematic to develop a consolidated democracy.

Political participation and institutions

A cohesive political party system is often associated with democratic sustainability. Turkey offers an example of a party system that began with just two parties for the first contested election in 1950. However, over time, party numbers grew. This was a consequence of increasing political polarisation and ideological division. The consequence was that, in 2015, there were nine parties represented in parliament and around forty smaller parties without a parliamentary presence.¹⁸ Their ideological concerns ranged from those represented by secular, ultra-nationalist parties, through Islamic groups, to those of the extreme left.

In the mid-1970s, at the start of the third wave of democracy, Turkey’s party system was characterised by volatility, fragmentation and ideological polarisation.¹⁹ Volatility took the form of sudden and significant changes in the share of the votes that the main parties gained from one election to the next. Fragmentation was reflected in increasing numbers of parties appearing in parliament, while ideological polarisation was represented by parties such as the Islamic National Salvation Party and the ultra-nationalist National Action Party (NAP). The appearance of ideologically polarised parties was symptomatic of wider divisions appearing in society at this time. Not only did parties polarise, but so did many Turkish institutions, including the bureaucracy, the universities, schools, the media and the police. This was a symptom of an important transformation in the Turkish system as a whole; a sharpening left-right ideological dimension that encouraged the military to return to power in 1980, leading to the temporary cessation of democracy.

How to explain Turkey’s sharpening ideological divisions in the 1970s? It seems certain that the loss of political efficacy for centre parties was exacerbated by the country’s serious fiscal, social and economic difficulties and pervasive state-level political corruption from the 1970s, which appeared to encourage some people to look to extremist solutions. Economic problems placed new limits on the largesse that parties were able to distribute among their supporters. This was a serious blow to their chances of picking up votes.²⁰ The drift from the moderate parties was also encouraged by the fact that most of Turkey’s political parties were

organised as strongly centralised organisations, highly dependent on access to government patronage, dominated by their top leaders who were rarely challenged from below. The consequence was that Turkey's parties did not develop as electoral vehicles to represent various societal interests but as clientelist networks through which government resources could be channelled to supporters. Moderate parties tended to neglect essential organisational work, concentrating instead on media appeals and image-building with the help of professional public-relations experts. The result was that local party organisations were often dominated by small groups of activists whose power came from the fact that they could control access to the senior leadership. Organisation tended to be loose, membership records were not well kept and branches only really sprang to life at election times. The point is that such parties did not fulfil the necessary role of cohesive parties and were not, as a result, conducive to democratic consolidation.

The military government tried to overhaul the party system by manipulating electoral laws. In 1983, it introduced a statute proclaiming that a 10 per cent national threshold – and even higher constituency thresholds – was necessary for parties to take seats in parliament. The hope was that this would lead to the elimination of the most intensely ideological parties, leading instead to a 'manageable' system of two or three parties. However, there continued to be a weakening of the politically moderate centre-right and centre-left, with a rise in popularity both of nationalist and religious parties. For example, in the 1995 elections, Refah, the main Islamic grouping, achieved 21.4 per cent of the vote, the ultra-nationalist NAP gained 8.2 per cent, and the Kurdish nationalist HADEP garnered 4.2 per cent. While this result 'boost[ed] the combined extremist vote share to one-third and raised the possibility that Turkish democracy [was] facing a systemic challenge',²¹ it also reflected the fact that parties such as Refah put in much care and attention to grassroots organisation, a strategy which paid off in electoral successes. Ten years later, a moderate Islamic party with its roots in Refah – the AKP (Justice and Development Party) – was in power, gaining nearly 35 per cent of the vote in the July 2007 elections. In the most recent elections (2011), the AKP consolidated its hold on power still further, acquiring just under half (49.91 per cent) of all votes cast on an 85 per cent turnout.²²

Turning to civil society, a lack of consultation by government and a resulting paucity of consensus meant that its policies often faced heavy societal resistance and remained unimplemented. Opposition was not only focused in the burgeoning numbers of political parties, but also in Turkey's relatively robust civil society. Groups within civil society, many of which were focused in the country's powerful trade union movement, tended to be characterised by a relatively high degree of organisational independence, and supported in their clashes with the state by the relatively strong and independent judiciary.

In sum, Turkey's party system has not been conducive to democratic consolidation as it became increasingly fragmented, volatile and ideologically polarised. Parties were very often the personal vehicles of senior leaders, which did not encourage the development of essential representational aspects among supporters. Those parties that did energetically seek to recruit supporters at the grassroots were often those labelled extremist parties. Civil society organisations, especially those connected to the trade union movement, served as an important focus of anti-state opposition.

International and economic factors

From the 1970s, Turkey has experienced often serious economic problems which have impacted upon political developments. Turkey enjoyed sustained economic growth during the 1960s, but it declined in the 1970s. Turkey, a non-oil producer, felt the impact of rising oil

prices that led to severe balance-of-payments problems and high price inflation. By 1975, two-thirds of export earnings were spent on buying oil products and inflation soared to over 100 per cent a year; and, in 1980, an economic austerity programme was introduced to try to deal with the problems. While this led to substantial macroeconomic improvements, including improved export performance and falling price inflation, the improvements did not last. By the late 1980s inflation had risen again to over 70 per cent a year. Encouraged by the International Monetary Fund, the government introduced new, forceful measures to try to deal with inflation. However, it remained high – around 80 per cent in the mid-1990s, before rising to about 100 per cent in 1997. To attempt to deal with the situation, the government introduced a three-year economic stabilisation programme, which cut state jobs and led to increased hardship among millions of ordinary people.

The problem for Turkish governments has been that economic problems have tended to stimulate the rise of ‘extremist’ parties which have called for radical solutions – such as fundamental political reforms – to deal with the situation. But radical solutions are often seen as potentially destabilising and therefore anathema to the self-appointed guardians of the status quo: the military. Whereas in the past, the armed forces would deal with perceived instability by, if necessary, taking over government for a time, increasingly this option is unavailable. This is largely because Turkey is anxious to gain membership of the European Union, an organisation open only to democracies with good human rights records. Although Turkey has been an associate member of the European Economic Community (EEC), since 1964, its relations with the EEC’s successor, the European Union, have deteriorated, especially in the wake of the 1980 military coup, not only because it dissolved democracy but also because some armed forces personnel were accused of serious human rights violations.

The resumption of democracy in 1983 led to a rebuilding of Turkey’s links with the EU and the Council of Europe. In 1989, the European Commission laid down a number of stringent conditions for admission, including improved human rights and clear progress towards better relations with Greece. But Turkey could not fulfil these conditions and has remained outside the EU. In 1995 Turkey and the EU signed a customs union, but the country was again passed over for membership, as it was again mid-1997 when in principle five Eastern European states were allowed to join. It seems likely that Turkey’s recent military actions against rebellious Kurds had been a factor in the decision to deny it EU membership. In sum, Turkey’s desire for membership may have encouraged the army not to attempt to take power since 1980, but the inability to deal with various human rights problems and the issue of the Kurds meant that it was denied its goal as an EU member.

By 2015, Turkey’s continuing application for membership of the EU polarised public opinion. On the one hand, for some it threatened Turkey’s sense of cultural identity, while for others the chief purpose of the country’s bid for membership of the EU was to seek to drive a wedge between ‘Islamic fundamentalists’ and moderate Muslims by offering the latter an example of what moderation can achieve.

While in the Muslim Middle East democracy has made some progress in recent years, evidence presented in this section overall confirms Diamond’s view that ‘culturally and historically, this [that is, the Arab Middle East] has been the most difficult terrain in the world for political freedom and democracy’.²³ Attempts to explain why this should be the case are often linked to the political importance of: Islam; strong, centralised states, often led by personalistic leaders, bequeathed by colonialism; and strongly politicised militaries anxious to maintain the political status quo. On the other hand, we have slow, often hesitant moves towards democracy in a few regional countries, including Jordan, Kuwait and Morocco. In addition, we saw that in the case of Turkey, despite the singularity of its own political experiences, the country’s

problematic experiences with democratisation suggests a conclusion of wider relevance to the Middle East region: structural factors – including politically active militaries and state intolerance of criticism – have made democratic progress difficult, while the role of Islam has been highly variable, ranging from outright hostility to overt acceptance.

Christian churches and democratisation in Sub-Saharan Africa

In the 1980s and 1990s, Sub-Saharan Africa experienced something it had not seen for decades: widespread popular calls for democratisation, part of a wider package of demands for more and better economic and human rights. There followed pro-democracy regime change in a number of African countries, including Benin, Cape Verde, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Niger, Sao Tomé, Sierra Leone and Zambia. Elsewhere, however, authoritarian rulers demonstrated ability, at least temporarily, to stay put either by winning elections (Ghana, Burkina Faso) or by simply refusing to budge (Togo, Kenya, Zaire).

By the mid-2000s, a clearer democratic picture had emerged. In 1976, only three African countries were considered by Freedom House to be free, with eighteen judged partly free and twenty-eight not free. By 2007, the number of free African countries had nearly quadrupled, to eleven. Twenty-four were judged to be partly free (an increase of 33 per cent), while fourteen were not free (50 per cent fewer).²⁴

Demands for democratisation had both domestic and external roots. Domestically, demands for reform reflected an awakening – or reawakening – of an often long-dormant political voice for various civil society groups, with trade union officials, higher-education students, business-people, civil servants and religious – mostly Christian – figures initially leading and coordinating popular demands for reform. Professional politicians later made such demands integral parts of their programmes for election. The widespread expectation was that popular efforts would force long-entrenched, often venal governments from office. Democratically elected regimes would take power, with new leaders tackling with energy, resourcefulness and imagination pressing political, social and economic problems. Previously ignored political constituencies would be heard, human rights would be observed, including the precious freedom to criticise governments without fear of incarceration. A second factor was that Africa's democratisation was the 'road map' for political change preferred by key external actors: Western governments who provided Africa with the bulk of its foreign aid.

In sum, demands for democratisation in Sub-Saharan Africa are best explained through the interaction of domestic and international factors, with the former of most importance.

Religious figures, notably Christian leaders, added their voices to the clamour for democratic changes in the region. Leading Catholics were frequently involved in national conferences on the political way forward in a number of French-speaking countries, including Congo-Brazzaville, Togo, Mali, Niger, Gabon, Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) and Chad. The outcome in Congo-Brazzaville was the democratic election of a new government, although the political situation remained tense. In Togo, Chad, Gabon and Zaire, on the other hand, such conferences did not lead, in the short term, either to new constitutions or democratically elected governments. In Zaire and Togo, led respectively by Presidents Mobutu and Eyadema, the outcome was initially stalemate, as opposition forces were too weak to unseat them. In Chad, societal Christian-Muslim polarisation meant that the political situation was volatile. In Gabon, Omar Bongo retained power for a while, despite the registration of thirteen political parties and a powerful, although unsuccessful challenge, from an opposition leader, Paul Mba-Abesole (a Catholic priest) and his movement, *Le Rassemblement de Boucherons* (National Society of Woodcutters). In mainly Muslim Niger and Mali, however, new political

leaders and democratically elected governments emerged. In sum, involvement of Catholic leaders in national democracy conferences reflected the fact that the Catholic Church was often one of only a few national institutions that had managed to keep a degree of corporate independence from the state. In addition, a Muslim culture in a country was not necessarily a barrier to democratisation.

Two main issues form the focus of this section of the chapter. The first is the relationship of senior religious figures to the state in Africa and the role of the former in regional countries' attempts to democratise. The second is to examine the political importance of 'popular' religions – that is, religions not legitimised by a close relationship between their leaders and those of the state, but instead with bottom-up structures rooted in grassroots concerns. The first task is to establish the nature of the links between senior religious figures and state elites in Africa, in the context of the third wave of democracy. The second is to make some preliminary observations about the political nature of popular religions in Sub-Saharan Africa and their varying relationships to democracy.

State and religion in comparative perspective in Africa

In Sub-Saharan Africa, as elsewhere, leaders of religious bodies – whether Christian or Muslim – are social products of the societies from which they come. As individuals, they may be theoretically and intellectually convinced of the benefits of democracy, understanding that concept in both structural (appropriate political institutions, including independent legislature and judiciary) and normative ('real', pluralistic, competition, worthwhile civic freedoms) terms. Yet they also have to go about their daily business in an environment characterised by state heavy handedness, the threat or expectation of military involvement in politics, shortages of economic resources, venality, corruption, and suspicion or worse between ethnic and/or religious groups. As a result, it seems plausible to surmise that their personal opinions regarding the theoretical desirability of democracy are often, and often necessarily, at least partially moulded by a pursuit of individualistic material concerns. In short, I am suggesting that many religious leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa will have both individual, as well as institutional, economic interests and concerns in terms, for example, of improving their church's 'market share', perhaps by seeking restrictions on their chief rivals.²⁵

Since Africa's independence from colonial rule, church and state developed mutually supportive relationships in many regional countries. The role of Christian churches vis-à-vis government in the region, as elsewhere, is in theory a simple and clear one, well expressed in the following: 'limits of the state's sphere of action are set by the definition of 'temporal', that is, those activities of civilisation that arise in the 'earthly' city . . . The church in no way limits the state's rights. Church and state complement one another, each by working in its proper realm.'²⁶

However, in practice churches in Sub-Saharan Africa often found themselves on the horns of a dilemma: to what extent should they dare to criticise authoritarian governments – even when they clearly abused power in ways that Christian morality found unacceptable? Two distinct, mutually exclusive, options presented themselves: (1) to speak out and expect to be criticised by rulers for doing so, or (2) publicly keep quiet – but seek to change government policy by persuasion behind the scenes.

There was also a third option. As the extremely cordial relations between Catholic Church leaders and the Mobutu regime in Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) illustrates, it was in both the interests of both church and state for there to be social and political stability, even if it required authoritarian rule to achieve it. The cordial relationship is well illustrated in a

1965 declaration from the then-Archbishop of Kinshasa, Joseph Malula. Addressing President Mobutu personally, he stated that 'the Church recognizes your authority, because authority comes from God. We will loyally apply the laws you establish. You can count on us in your work of restoring the peace toward which all so ardently aspire'.²⁷ True to Malula's word, until the early 1990s, the Catholic hierarchy in Zaire was consistently unwilling to engage the regime in direct public confrontation. It was only after an unprecedented show of public displeasure – significantly involving young priests and nuns – that the Catholic hierarchy was galvanised publicly to oppose Mobutu's authoritarian rule.

It is sometimes claimed that senior Catholic figures were bought off by material inducements, quite apart from the fact that the institutional role of the Church was believed to be supportive of almost any temporal regime, including Mobutu's authoritarian rule. As the quotation from Malula indicates, God was believed to confer absolute authority on ruling governments. Understandably, Malula was anxious to continue the good working relationship with the state, to build on the mutually supportive arrangement which had typified the colonial period. Overall, occasional differences between Catholic and colonial authorities were slight in comparison to the many issues on which church and state worked together in tandem.

More generally, for church leaders in Africa, silence in the face of poor and/or corrupt government following independence reflected a number of concerns: they themselves may have benefited materially from the status quo; many were inherently conservative and believed that governments, however bad, were exercising authority ordained by God; and, finally, such leaders often recognised that their church's corporate position in a country was in part dependent upon state acquiescence or support. In Zaire, for example, the value of cooperation with civil authorities for church leaders led them to use various modes of communication and influence in their relationship with society and the governing regime.²⁸ This is the idea of the 'two realms' of church and state, where the former may attempt to influence the latter by persuasion but has no other means at its disposal if it wishes to retain its privileged position. In other words, normally the church hierarchy can be no more than an interlocutor between state and society. As the trajectory of Mobutu's rule only too clearly showed, those who gain a reputation for outspoken criticism were very likely to find themselves incarcerated – or worse. Such a position may also have been related to the fact that senior Christian figures were well treated personally by Mobutu. For example, 'Cardinal Malula lived in a mansion that the President gave him [in 1974] . . . in 1978 or so the President gave a Mercedes to every bishop, Protestant or Catholic'. The result was that Catholicism, in partnership with the powerful, independent Kimbanguist Church, 'assumed some of the functions of an ideology in the service of the dominant class'.²⁹ A further factor – apart from concerns with stability and the fears of repercussions of openly challenging regimes – is that some Christian leaders were personally closely associated with ruling regimes, sometimes to the extent of holding political appointments. For example, in Lesotho in the early 1970s, the post-independence government of Chief Leabua Jonathan and the National Party was predominantly Catholic in support and conservative in policy, enjoying the support of South Africa's apartheid regime. The position was similar in Togo. There, the ruling party, *Le Rassemblement du Peuple Togolais* (RPT), had a hegemonic position analogous to that of the dominant parties in Zaire and Lesotho. The Catholic Church – with about a third of Togo's people – dominated spiritually. Together, Catholic and secular elites in the RPT dominated politically and spiritually, maintaining a strong grip on society. A further example comes from Rwanda where, until 1985, the Catholic archbishop of Kigali was on the central committee of the single party, the *Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement*. In addition, Bishop Matale's membership of the commission for instituting

a one-party state in the 1970s in Zambia was also a clear manifestation of a close relationship between state and church.³⁰

This is not to suggest that all senior Christian figures enjoyed cosy relationships with ruling regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa. For example, in Liberia the Catholic Archbishop of Monrovia, Michael Francis, was a strong and outspoken advocate of human rights and social justice. From the mid-1970s, he consistently critiqued Liberia's socio-political and moral situation, underlining what he saw as three debilitating forms of corruption: 'social corruption' ('unjust imprisonment, detention without charge or trial, inhuman and degrading prison conditions'), 'professional corruption' (when government personnel abuse their positions to make money or 'employ individuals because they are of the same family, or tribe, or are girlfriends'), and 'personal corruption' ('the all-pervasive sexual immorality of the country'). Over time, a number of Catholic priests in Liberia followed Francis's critical lead. But while he personally escaped governmental reprisals, other, more junior figures, were less fortunate, with many suffering harassment by the state's security services.³¹

Given the mutually supportive relationships between many senior church figures and states, how can we account for involvement of Christian leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa's attempts at democratisation from the 1980s and 1990s? Some analysts regard the leaders of the mainline (as distinct from the independent) churches as highly significant actors in this context. Leading Christians are said to have practically dragged unwilling, undemocratic governments towards the dreaded ballot box. Such figures are said to have led pro-democracy agitation not only because they were democrats personally (as a result of their Christianity), but also because their 'flocks' had collectively experienced diminishing benefits from non-democratic rule: poor government, bad economic policies and unworkable ideological programmes. In short, Africa's democratisation is perceived to be a result of: (1) Christian leaders' tenacity, clear-sightedness, and lack of fear of the consequences of their actions, and (2) such figures' burning sense of outrage on behalf of their followers.³²

Proponents of the 'Christians as necessarily democrats' argument also point to interaction of international and domestic factors to explain how Christian leaders have been prominent in pro-democracy campaigns in several parts of the world. For example, Diamond notes how: 'religious institutions, especially the Catholic Church, have been prominent in the movements of a great many countries – notably, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, the Philippines, South Korea, Poland, Haiti, South Africa, and most recently Kenya – to oppose, denounce, frustrate and remove authoritarian regimes'.³³

Christian institutional independence and integrity in relation to state power is an essential facet of the post-colonial African structure of power relations. Because, in the main, most expressions of the world religions tended to be identified with the main interest groups, whether ethnic or class, they were available in a diffuse form as a mediating element, relatively neutral ground, in social and political conflict. Religious institutions were therefore generally accorded respect by the political elite. This argument locates both Christian and Muslim religious institutions as interlocutors between state and society, respected bodies whose leaders' own personal desires and preferences are subsumed in their concern to disinterestedly mediate between citizens and government.

Religious *institutional* independence and integrity in relation to state power characterises Africa's post-colonial structure of power relation. Because Christian churches are rarely identified with a country's main ethnic or class interest groups, they can perform key mediating tasks, including providing relatively neutral political ground. Reflecting this, political elites often respect Christian churches and their leaders. Churches are key interlocutors between state and society, respected bodies whose leaders' own personal desires and preferences are

subsumed in their concern disinterestedly to mediate between citizens and government. The involvement of senior Christian figures in national democracy conferences in the early 1990s can be understood in this context.

An alternative argument is that religious leaders in Africa are normally class actors in partnership with secular elites to develop and perpetuate regime hegemony, implying that such figures are normally strongly supportive of the status quo. As result, it is aberrant for them to demand fundamental political changes.³⁴ In this view, Africa's democratic initiatives in the 1980s and early 1990s were primarily examples of what Gramsci called 'passive revolution'. The main purpose of religious leaders' mediating between factions – for example, via national democracy conferences – was primarily to settle intra-elite disputes between contenders for state power.

This hypothesis is relevant not only to Christian but also Muslim leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, two of the seven countries that held national democracy conferences in the early 1990s, Mali and Niger, are both strongly Muslim countries (about 90 per cent Muslim in each case). Senior Muslim figures played leading roles in both countries' national democracy conferences. On the other hand, members of the *ulama* (religio-legal scholars) are typically supporters of the status quo, because it allows them to be integrally involved in the running of the affairs of Muslims in their state because of the control they can exercise via their control of the national Muslim organisations. Their partnership with state-level politicians is thus crucial.

Conclusion

Religious leaders can occupy an important role as interlocutor between their followers and the state. But to maintain positions of power and authority it is of course necessary for religious leaders to retain their followers; as a result, they need as far as possible to prevent mass defections to competitors. In recent times, however, leaders of both mainline churches and orthodox expressions of Islam in Africa have found themselves threatened by an increase in popular religiosity. While democracy and pluralism have made some progress in some Muslim countries in recent years, it is worth repeating Diamond's view stated above: 'culturally and historically' the Arab Muslim Middle East is 'the most difficult terrain in the world for political freedom and democracy'.³⁵ Attempts to explain why this is the case are often linked to the political importance of: Islam; strong, centralised states, often led by personalistic leaders, often bequeathed by colonialism or imperialism; and strongly politicised militaries anxious to maintain the political status quo. Yet, our brief examination of democratisation in Turkey would belie the view that democracy is impossible to achieve in a strongly Muslim country. In relation to Sub-Saharan Africa, we saw that Christian leaders have been both supporters of the status quo and, on occasion, have challenged it, for example, when pro-democracy was *de rigueur* in the region in the 1990s.

Clearly, then, Islam is not inherently anti-democratic. While some Muslims, whether in Turkey or Sub-Saharan Africa, may see liberal democracy quite differently compared to, say, some types of Christianity, not all by any means find democracy per se anathema. It is important to see the political struggles of Islamists as primarily directed against their own typically undemocratic rulers and political systems. This fits in with a key historic characteristic of politics in the Muslim world, especially in what many would see as its heartland: the Arab countries of the Middle East. Since the beginning of Islam, nearly 1,400 years ago, critics of the status quo have periodically emerged in opposition to what they perceive as unjust rule.

The goal of the 'just' in Islamic history has been to form popular consultative mechanisms (*shura*) in line with the Qur'anic idea that Muslim rulers must not only be open to

popular pressure but also seek to settle problems brought by subjects to a common satisfaction. However, the concept of *shura* should not be equated closely with the Western notion of popular sovereignty because to many Muslims – especially those we noted above as ‘traditionalist Islamists’ – sovereignty resides with God alone. Thus *shura* is a way of ensuring unanimity from the *ummah*, the community of Muslims, which allows for no legitimate minority position. However, ‘modernist Islamists’ and ‘Muslim secularists’ do not necessarily oppose ‘Western’ liberal interpretations of democracy, unless it is seen as a system that negates God’s own sovereignty. It is partly for this reason that traditionalist Islamists are often conspicuous by their absence in demands for Western-style democratic changes. On the other hand, many more moderate Islamists accept the need for earthly rulers to seek a mandate from their constituency.

Notes

- 1 Huntington, *The Third Wave*.
- 2 Waylen, ‘Gender and transitions’, p. 157.
- 3 Huntington, *The Third Wave*.
- 4 Diamond, ‘Consolidating democracies’.
- 5 Haynes, *Democracy in the Developing World*.
- 6 Gel’man, ‘Post-Soviet transitions and democratization’.
- 7 Akbar, *The Shade of Swords*; Diamond, Plattner and Brumberg, *Islam and Democracy in the Middle East*; Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam*; Noyon, *Islam, Politics and Pluralism*; Muqtedar Khan, *Islamic Democratic Discourse*; Fattah, *Democratic Values in the Muslim World*.
- 8 Huntington, *The Third Wave*.
- 9 Noyon, *Islam, Politics and Pluralism*.
- 10 See, for example, Ananta, Arifin and Suryadinata, *Emerging Democracy in Indonesia*; Nyman, *Democratizing Indonesia*.
- 11 Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam*.
- 12 Karl, ‘The hybrid regimes of Central America’, p. 79.
- 13 Turkey and Indonesia may well now be exceptions. See Fattah, *Democratic Values in the Muslim World*.
- 14 See, for example, Khan, *Islamic Democratic Discourse*; Fattah, *Democratic Values in the Muslim World*.
- 15 Fattah, *Democratic Values in the Muslim World*, p. 4.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- 17 ‘Turkey received a downward trend arrow [in 2015] due to more pronounced political interference in anticorruption mechanisms and judicial processes, and greater tensions between majority Sunni Muslims and minority Alevis’. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/turkey#.VWhmqGfbKUK>.
- 18 ‘Political parties in Turkey’. <http://www.allaboutturkey.com/parti.htm>.
- 19 Ozbudun, ‘Turkey: How far from consolidation?’, p. 124.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 125.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 125.
- 22 ‘Political parties in Turkey’. <http://www.allaboutturkey.com/parti.htm>.
- 23 Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, p. 270.
- 24 Freedom House 2007. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2007>.
- 25 The argument in this section comes from Haynes, *Religion and Politics in Africa*.
- 26 Haynes, *Religion in Global Politics*, p. 107.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 Haynes, *Religion and Politics in Africa*, p. 111.
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 *Ibid.*, pp. 111–12.

- 31 Ibid., pp. 112–13.
- 32 Haynes, 'Religion and democratization in Africa'.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Haynes, *Religion and Politics in Africa*.
- 35 Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, p. 270.

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