

## THE CHANCE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY IN CENTRAL ASIA OR THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS IN SHAPING POLITICAL MODERNITY

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### **Abstract:**

The aim of this paper is to analyze the theoretical and practical underpinnings for a potentially beneficial role that religion can play in strengthening counter-authoritarian groups and civil society in Central Asian states. Both fundamentalist and moderate standings on compatibility between religious practices, key Islamic sources, and pluralism are assessed. The present political situation in the five Central Asian states constitute a suggestive case study and show the need, as well as the opportunity, for religious channels of expression of dissident and opposition sentiments.

**Key words:** civil society, secularism, multiple modernities, Islam, Central Asia.

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Soon two decades will have passed since the five Central Asian republics<sup>1</sup> gained their formal independence from the Soviet Union, and since they have embarked on the road to redefining or rediscovering their national and religious identities. The aim of this paper is to provide a theoretical analysis of the assumed role that Islam plays in mobilizing citizens across the region, and to point to favoring conditions, as well as obstacles, in assigning a political role for Islam. Therefore, this analysis will proceed from the wider debate on modernity, secularism, and Islam, and move towards the role religion may play in the peaceful mobilization of citizens in the context of an authoritarian past.

### Discussing secularization

If viewed as a process, secularization points to a change in society's most basic principles of organization. Secularization can be a possible loss for society as a whole, since religious institutions can lose their social significance, and their role can become either substituted with a modern benchmark or suppressed entirely. As Wilson argues, "Religion ceases to be significant in the working of the social system"<sup>2</sup> in the wider context of a change from a community to association through the process of *societalization*.

Asad<sup>3</sup>, taking this argument further, argues that the basic meaning and consequence of secularism is the transcended mediation it provides. More specifically, in a modern state citizenship is the primary principle that transcends the different identities built around class or religion. As John L. Esposito argues for the case of Turkey, this is not, however, an irreversible process<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, it seems that in the 'modern' world secularism is not always the rule,<sup>5</sup> and therefore the entire body of literature written on the link between modernity,<sup>6</sup> the decline of religion in society, and the minds of individuals must be reconsidered. In the present paper, the meaning of secularization is a specific one, in which it

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1 Conventionally discussed together are Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

2 See Wilson, Bryan. "Secularization and Its Discontents" in *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1982, p. 150.

3 Asad, Talal. "Thinking about Secularism" in *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, modernity*, Stanford University Press, 2003, p. 5.

4 Esposito, John L. "Islam and Secularism in the Twenty First Century" in *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*, Azzam Tamimi and John L. Esposito, eds., C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2001, pp. 5-6.

5 Berger, Peter L., "Secularism in Retreat" in *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*, Azzam Tamimi and John L. Esposito, eds., C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2001, p. 38

6 The so-called 'secularization theory' developed fully in the 1950/1960s.

means<sup>7</sup> not just that the state should be free from religion, but also that religion should be free from the state.

Central to understanding the role that religion can come to play within a modern democratic framework is the concept discussed by Taylor and Asad<sup>8</sup> of *overlapping consensus*. This concept allows for different reasons derived from different ethics to become integrated into the political arena. Only in this manner can the background justifications or the core philosophical underpinnings of religions be transcended in a way that would permit consensus across faiths and individuals. The question I ask, and try to answer in this paper, is the following: can Islamic revival in Central Asia be a sustainable way to challenge authoritarianism,<sup>9</sup> and therefore, can it help to reinforce secularism in these countries?

We must also reconsider the place religion is assigned to in these societies, since secularism as a doctrine requires that religion to be reduced to the so-called private sphere. I, however, would adopt the argument expressed by Asad that distinguishes between *private space* and *private reason*, where the latter is the “entitlement to difference, the immunity from the force of public reason”<sup>10</sup>. The protection of a certain degree of difference can be considered a key ingredient in facilitating democratic debate. Therefore, the equal protection of private reason against religious and political fundamentalism might be the answer to the search for equilibrium in modern societies. This implies the need for total tolerance in each society for believers and non-believers, and eliminating the possible discriminative practices that could go along this differentiation.

### **Modernity and civil society contextualized**

What the significance of being modern is, and what the category of modern politics includes, are questions not frequently agreed upon in political sciences, sociology and international relations theory, among other disciplines. If the European modern state system is considered to start with the peace of Westphalia (1648), which ended *de facto* the Holy Roman Empire and marked the beginning of a new era in European politics, when could a similar moment in other parts of the world be

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7 Esposito, *op. cit.*, p. 5

8 Asad, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

9 Authoritarianism that, according to the definitions above, can be thought of in opposition with secularism.

10 Asad, *op. cit.*, p. 8

identified? Is the era of decolonization a case of a historical shift for a great number of other countries? It might prove less productive to dilute the Westphalia moment to the point that it only stands for an instance of what Weber might call the *ideal type*, which is in this case the separation of religion and politics. In Western philosophical thought, modernity is more clearly identified as beginning with Descartes' writings on self-evident principles, and with Kant's critical analysis of ethical principles<sup>11</sup>. In her analysis, Sonn<sup>12</sup> considers that there are no crucial obstacles inherent in Islam to the development of what in the Christian space came to be called *secularism* and *rationalism*, both of which are key components of *modernity*. She also points also to impressive findings on the protection of pluralism in pre-modern Islamic law.

To be more precise, Asad defines modernity as a project whose goal is to institutionalize the principles of constitutionalism, moral autonomy, human rights, civil equality, consumerism, free markets, and most importantly, secularism itself,<sup>13</sup> the latter of which might happen in parallel with the process of disenchantment, or with direct access to reality unwrapped from myths, magic and sacred. However, it might just be that we are dealing with two kinds of modernity,<sup>14</sup> since the West's modernity focuses on the separation of religion and politics, while in modern Islamic democracies, pluralism<sup>15</sup> is considered to be more important.

Another key concept to be discussed here is *civil society*<sup>16</sup>, which can be viewed as an intermediary *reason*, which is neither public nor private, and is where the social creeps into the arena to help express the concerns that emerge uniquely on one side. Without further exploring the limits of privateness, as Casanova does in employing Goffman<sup>17</sup>, it is more relevant to look at what extent this form of social organization can help a given society to emerge from an authoritarian system. The end point of

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11 Sonn, Tamara, "Islam and Modernity: Are They Compatible?" in *Modernization, Democracy, and Islam*, Hunter, Shireen T. and Huma Malik eds., Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2005, p. 65.

12 Sonn, op. cit. see full chapter.

13 Asad, op. cit., p. 13.

14 John Voll and Eisenstadt have argued that it is a mistake to equate modernity with the West and argue that modernity can come in a variety of culturally defined forms. See Voll, John O., "The Mistaken Identification of 'The West' with 'Modernity'" in *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 13, vol 1, no. 1, spring 1996, pp. 1-6.

15 Sonn, op. cit., p. 79.

16 For extensive debates on the cultural bias underlying this concept, see among others, Anderson, John. "Creating a Framework for Civil Society in Kyrgyzstan" in *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 52, No. 1, 2000, pp. 77-93.

17 Casanova, Jose. "Private and Public Religions" in *Public Religions in the Modern World*, The University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 42-43.

progress is then the often acclaimed *rule of law*, and an inclusive and pluralistic socio-political environment. In the Islamic tradition, the supreme source of order is also the law, but given the supremacy of a God-given law, the divine law is the organizing principle of the state. The sources of Islamic constitution are therefore the Koran, Sunna, conceptions of the rightly Guided Caliphs, and the rulings of great jurists according to Abu-l Ala Mawdudi<sup>18</sup>, one of the recent fundamentalist political thinkers of Islam.

When discussing the split between state and religion, the case of Islam poses one more historical problem due to the fact that, as Casanova points out, the religious and political community are coexistent<sup>19</sup>. The inseparability of state and faith in the case of Islam is systematically argued for by several political thinkers (see Suleiman, Mawdudi, Al Turabi and Muhammed Asad), and arguments for the lack of division between the private and public in Islam<sup>20</sup> also exist, which draw on the traditional sources mentioned before, whether they be “unambiguous” (Koran, Sunna) or “alterable”<sup>21</sup> (Tawil, Qijas, Istihsan<sup>22</sup>).

Only from the creative interpretative point of view can civil society be best accommodated with the Islamic tradition in what Hanafi<sup>23</sup> calls a modernist approach to social movements. He identifies a clear distinction between the public and private sphere in several Muslim states<sup>24</sup>, and points to evidence that in the public sphere you can find liberal civil right and liberties, equality in front of the law, freedom of expression, and democracy and pluralism (to different extents). The other sphere concerns what he calls family law, which is more likely to be governed by the Shari’a. It is, however, controversial to what extent this sphere still maintains the qualities of what could be called the private. Hanafi chooses to follow the judicial distinction and ignores a more philosophical approach that identifies the private with non-interference of state authorities, with the exception of actions that are undertaken that cause severe damage to society or society’s established order.

A key point that Hanafi makes is that the solution to the emergence

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18 Discussed by Ate\_, Hamza. “Towards a Distinctive Model? Reconciling the Views of Contemporary Muslim Thinkers on an Ideal State for Muslim Societies” in *Religion, State and Society*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2001, pp. 348-366.

19 Casanova, op. cit., p. 48.

20 Ate\_, op. cit., pp. 354-355.

21 Distinction introduced by Mawdudi, see Ate\_, op. cit., p. 351.

22 Interpretation, Analogy and Justice Preference

23 Hanafi, Hasan, “A Reflective Islamic Approach” in *Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society*, Simone Chambers and Will Kymlicka, Princeton University Press, 2002, pp. 171-189.

24 The middle ground cases he refers to are: Morocco, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Oman.

of a civil society in a Muslim country, from what he calls a reformist-modernist approach, is to have a pluralistic society<sup>25</sup>. He does not fully explore the meaning of pluralism, leaving the impression that he means all options are acceptable with the condition that the supremacy of law is upheld. The role of civil society in Western polities is, among other things, one that provides a balance and extra safety mechanism in limiting the role of a central power. This is harmonious with Islamic culture's similar concern about limiting the power of political authorities. Hanafi discusses how in medieval Islamic theory there was tension between the wielder of power (*imam, Kalif, Sultan*) and the ulama, and between the intellectuals and legal scholar that were most familiar with the *shari'a*<sup>26</sup>. Due to the interpreters' independence from political authority, they could assume the role of maintaining a system of checks and balances alongside the judges, who could choose to lead a revolution against the ruler if he did not abide by the law<sup>27</sup>. This can, however, be considered the right of every Muslim if he considers that his ruler does not act according to the Islamic law<sup>28</sup>. Therefore, Hanafi discusses the existence of *divan al-mazalim*<sup>29</sup>, of *the awqaf*<sup>30</sup> and of mystical orders like the Sufi *tariqas*<sup>31</sup> that could play a similar role in civil society today, had the process of modern state emergence been less damaging to them<sup>32</sup>: "Islamic theory contains within it the idea of an integrated politico-religious community, but with power dispersed among its constituent elements"<sup>33</sup>.

However, contrary to what has been argued by several Muslim political thinkers<sup>34</sup>, Hanafi seems ready to openly argue that non-Muslim groups are not at all excluded from the Islamic state or from civil society, and he shows as evidence society in Medina when Jews and Christians were granted equal status with the Muslims<sup>35</sup>. To this he adds the

25 Hanafi, op. cit., pp. 171-172.

26 Hanafi, op. cit., pp. 174.

27 Gibb, H. A. R., "Constitutional Organization" in *Law in the Middle East*, Majid Khadduri and Herbert J. Liebesny, eds., Washington, Middle East Institute, 1955, quoted in Hanafi, op. cit., p. 175.

28 Zakaria, Fareed, "Islam, Democracy, and Constitutional Liberalism" in *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 119, no. 1, 2004, p. 5.

29 A small claims court of popular appeal or a tribunal to which any Muslim could go and complain against any form of injustice done to him by the ruler.

30 A religious endowment that had a high degree of autonomy from government interference in medieval Islamic societies.

31 Hanafi, op. cit., p. 175.

32 For instance the control the Egyptian state now exercises over the awqaf, or the elimination of Sufi tariqas by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. They are however still strong today in Morocco, Sudan, Turkey, and more importantly for the focus of this paper, in Central Asia.

33 Hanafi, op. cit., p. 175.

34 Ate\_, op. cit., entire article.

35 Hanafi, op. cit., p. 177.

argument brought about by the *millet* system, which acknowledged the right of each religious community to live within the confederated *umma* and to rule itself in many areas of communal life. This, however, is considered to have declined over time, as the concept of *dhimmi*<sup>36</sup> is sometimes equated with that of second class citizen, although it is in fact a very tolerant form of inclusion that does not involve assimilation.

Hanafi also emphasizes the social role that several Islamic religious organizations have undertaken to make up for the state's neglect of problems relating to social welfare: specifically, he points to mosques, Sufi orders, and charitable organizations<sup>37</sup>. This function has a high potential for the societies in Central Asia, particularly Kyrgyzstan, where according to World Bank data the poverty rate reached more than 40%<sup>38</sup> and the state has experienced major problems in providing necessary services to its citizens. Yet this is not the only solution that has been proposed for the region. Even as early as the era of *glasnost* in the Soviet Union, in early 1985 the need to replace soviet ethics pointed to the moral role that religion could be assigned in societies that struggled with public atheism (which was actually in many cases concealed private manifestation of religiosity). Therefore, the potential of Islam in sustaining the development of a civil society in any of the countries in Central Asia is much more evident than when we consider their past. Islam, then, seems to be the most accessible alternative to the demise of the Soviet social doctrine.

The question raised by Reuel Hanks<sup>39</sup> is key to understanding the definition of civil society that seems best suited for the topic of this paper. When looking at the definition of civil society, he wonders if democracy itself is not a prerequisite of the former, since the values of civil society are those of political participation, state accountability and the publicity of politics. Assuming that even if the two factors, civil society and the degree of democracy in general, influence each other to the extent of having equivalent roles, I will instead focus on the advantages Islam has in Central Asia as a social and political force, even

36 Hanafi, op. cit., p. 178.

37 Hanafi, op. cit., p. 182.

38 Another comprehensive analysis on the socio-economic conditions there can be found in Haghayeghi, Mehrdad, "Central Asia and Azerbaijan" in *Modernization, Democracy, and Islam*, Hunter, Shireen T. and Huma Malik eds., Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2005, p. 305

39 Hanks, Reuel. "Civil Society and Identity in Uzbekistan: The Emergent Role of Islam" in *Civil Society in Central Asia*, M. Holt Ruffin and Daniel Waugh eds., Center for Civil Society International, 1999. p. 158

in the absence of consolidated<sup>40</sup> or electoral democracy<sup>41</sup>. The potential stabilizing effects of Islam in the region have been pointed out before by François Burgast<sup>42</sup>, where he points to the participation of Islamic groups in the parliaments of Jordan and Kuwait. However, it should be kept in mind that Islam is not to be approached as a monolithic phenomenon throughout the world, or even throughout Central Asia, since even before communism there were significant differences in the countries in this region.

When mentioning civil society and Islam, many point to the role of the *maballa*, a specific form of social organization with economic benefits and implications. The *maballa* has played an integral part in the education of young generations, especially in their religious education, and has been considered the basis for civil society in Central Asia<sup>43</sup>. It has strong historical roots in Islam and can be considered a useful bridge between religious education and participative attitudes, which can be developed by members of a community given its organization and structure. Additionally, as proof of its potential, it was a widely used way to resist communism and atheism by providing underground religious instruction during the Soviet era<sup>44</sup>.

A further investigation into the structure and character of this form of social organization would prove useful if we are to consider the fact that it has retained its religious and social significance, particularly in Uzbekistan. It is a hierarchical structure with an elected council at the top administrative level, but also maintains an important role for the aksakals, or the elders of the community, with the notable inclusion of the local mullah and the local woman responsible for the religious education of the girls from the *maballa*<sup>45</sup>.

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40 Consolidated democracy according to Linz is the one in which the majority of the population and elites consider democracy to be the “only game in town” meaning that when facing disputes and challenges the solution envisaged is always defined within the limits of democratic competition. Linz, Juan J. and Alfred Stepan, “Toward Consolidated Democracies” in *Journal of Democracy*, 1996.

41 Electoral democracy according to Larry Diamond among others is the one in which we have the minimal requirements of democratic competition fulfilled, namely regular elections, while the society as such does not favor real competition among candidates. Diamond, Larry, “Universal Democracy?” in *Policy Review*, no. 1991, June 2003. See also Voll, John, O., “Islam and Democracy” in *Modernization, Democracy, and Islam*, Hunter, Shireen T. and Huma Malik eds., Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2005, p. 86.

42 Malashenko, Alexei V., “Islam and Politics in the Southern Zone of the Former USSR”, in *Central Asia and Transcaucasia: Ethnicity and Conflict*, Vitaly V. Naumkin ed., Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994, p. 117.

43 Hanks, op. cit., p. 166

44 This led to a phenomenon called “parallel Islam” proposed by Alexandre Bennigsen which refers to a practice of religious informal leadership in the mahalla.

45 Hanks, op. cit., pp. 167-168.



## Political Islam – right or wrong?

A short overview of the literature on the consequences of having religion, in this case Islam, represented at the political level can lead to contradicting conclusions, since in most analyses the fundamentalist, be them Catholic, Orthodox or Muslim, are given primary importance, while little or no attention is paid to more moderate cases.

Political parties in some of the countries in the area discussed here do not neglect the religious dimension, and address issues connected with the Islamic heritage, as well as the political dimensions, as shown in the case of Uzbek political parties, Birlík and Erk, and the more recently founded one, the Islamic Renaissance Party<sup>46</sup>. These were subject to quick governmental constraints, and the threat of fundamentalism was invoked throughout the region even before 9/11, given the high conflict potential attributed to religious movements following the civil war in Tajikistan.

The multiple<sup>47</sup> modernities<sup>48</sup> outlook is much more compatible with progress in the political arena for countries where a majority of the population is Muslim. According to a 2006 Gallup poll, in a large number of Muslim-majority countries there was widespread support for Shari'a as a source of legislation--with the exception of Turkey--while the majority of those surveyed also supported freedom of speech, religion, and assembly, and also believed that women should be allowed to occupy office at the highest levels of government<sup>49</sup>. In the cases of Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, the predominant view is that Islam should remain outside the political arena and be limited to the cultural one, a trend clearly identified in the aggressive secularism of the two country's constitutions<sup>50</sup>. Yet the political arenas in the two countries are extremely different, and provide examples of two different answers to the need for moral standards in societies that were affected by a violent technical and cultural modernization project initiated by the Soviet Union.

In the case of Kyrgyzstan, there was almost 15 years of western-modeled political and economic reforms, and a quite active society that was able to mobilize itself and organize a "Tulip revolution" to oust the increasingly authoritarian president Akayev. Therefore, although Kyrgyzstan remains troubled and risks still run high, the country has

46 Hanks, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

47 Discussed extensively by Eisenstadt, S.N., "Multiple Modernities" in *Daedalus*; Winter 2000; 129, 1, pp. 1-29.

48 It may sometimes happen that the plural for this word is not allowed since it is considered an "uncountable" noun.

49 Mogahed, Nadia, "Understanding Islamic democracy" comments on the Gallup survey 2006 in *Europe's World*, Spring 2006, pp. 163-165.

50 See the introduction in Ate\_, *op. cit.*

begun to stabilize itself on the road to consolidated democracy, and is doing so with an active civil society where Islam still has a limited and unrecognized role. In Turkmenistan the situation is quite the opposite, and the case of the personality cult surrounding the self-proclaimed Turkmenbashi can provide a challenging analysis of how a former soviet leader has redefined his strategy and tried to provide his subjects with an entirely new set of sacred objects for their faith. He is trying to re-invent the entire universe by renaming the months of the year, writing *Ruhnama*<sup>51</sup>, and promoting his book in the education system. The paradox is that the book is in fact a strange mixture of Koranic verses, communist brochures and Turkmen traditions.

A brief look at each of the other countries in the regions illustrates the different consequences that the lack of religious tolerance has in countries with communist heritage. For example, in Kazakhstan the fear of competition leads the president (in power since independence, 1991) to harshly limit religious groups' activity and freedom. Their social role is not recognized<sup>52</sup>, and religions are categorized in good/bad terms, leading to the prospect of doing so with political parties. The treatment of religion provides the basis for future social discontent and turmoil, which is not altogether unlikely with the aging of the present authoritarian ruler.

In both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (the latter another case of authoritarian leadership), when asked about democracy "a third of those expressing support for democracy were also willing to have opposition groups curtailed or banned."<sup>53</sup> It is generally assumed that an Islamic state in Uzbekistan could come about only as a result of a coup d'état by groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan<sup>54</sup>. The government, however, tries to co-opt religious groups and neighborhood organizations in order to secure its stability, while at the same time condemning and prosecuting those that are considered radical. Akiner considered that the trend of establishing an official religion and eventually declaring Uzbekistan an Islamic state would be similar to the case of

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51 The name can be translated to mean "The book of the soul/spirituality" and it is supposed to be written by Sparmurat Niyazov, the president of Turkmenistan. It has been placed at the same level with Koran and inscriptions from it appear on mosques walls. For more information see: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/ruhnama/ruhnama-index.html>

52 For more on this see Podoprighora, Roman, "Religious Freedom and Human Rights in Kazakhstan" in Religion, State & Society, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2003, pp. 123-132.

53 Holt Ruffin, M. and Daniel Waugh, Civil Society In Central Asia, University of Washington Press, 1999.

54 Akiner, Shirin, "The Politicisation of Islam in Postsoviet Central Asia" in Religion, State & Society, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2003, pp. 97-122.

Pakistan. This possibility has the advantage of opening up political debate and forging popular awareness of the social issues associated with it.

In the case of Kyrgyzstan, the rise of Hizb-ut-Tahir<sup>55</sup>, which calls for a peaceful emergence of a Caliphate in the region, placed its anti-state platform in opposition not only to the Kyrgyz government, but also to the other countries in the region. The main reason for its success there, Karagiannis<sup>56</sup> argues, is due to the fact that people feel unrepresented and the HuT offered them the chance to participate and express their opinions..

## Conclusions

Starting from the assumption that modernity is a flexible concept, just as is state, democracy, and civil society, I have argued that in the case of Central Asia these concepts find themselves represented in a particular manner that offers possibilities for Islam to play a beneficial role as an encompassing political and social movement. This is not, however, the only course that events can take given the political pressures that exist from national elites and external powers. Because it is thought that Islamic traditions do not to recognize the division between religion and other aspects of life, and most specifically between religion and politics, secularism is challenged in Central Asian societies by political groups such as IMU and HuT.

However, examples like the supremacy of law provided in the above arguments show the compatibility of Islam with the secular model of politics. Additionally, there are arguments that Islam does not permit governments that exceed their limits, in particular on issues involving the fundamental rights of the people. More significantly, the principle of compulsory consultation at all levels of the decision-making process says that government should ideally be established by consensus, which is a key point in understanding the opportunities for civil society in this context.

One important critique of this argument is that the main reason for the clash between the Western and Muslim model is that in Islam that the sole sovereignty must rest with God. In others words, Allah, not man, is the source of law and legitimacy in an Islamic system. Still, this does not mean that the resulting form of government must be a theocracy, but

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55 Its ideology is a system of beliefs that aspire both to explain the world and to change it. The ills of the society are attributed to the departure from Islamic ideals, and in turn a return to Islamic sources is advocated.

56 Karagiannis, Emmanuel, "Political Islam and Social Movement Theory: The Case of Hizb ut-Tahrir in Kyrgyzstan" in *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 33, No. 2, June 2005, pp. 137-149.

that the distinction between religion and state is viewed differently, or even eliminated in some cases.

In the cases of Central Asian states such a theoretical view of the state will face challenges that can help conceive of a suitable solution that considers social stability and welfare, and takes into account the local traditions that can help promote a more democratic society. Therefore, in analyzing these societies we must avoid the mistake using the dichotomy of choosing between either western standards of democracy and civil society<sup>57</sup> or traditional Islamic ones. Allowing and encouraging local forms of political involvement, even if they are predominantly religious, could be a proof of political maturity in these societies, and eventually, could help prevent extremism itself.

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<sup>57</sup> Freedom House criteria on the status of democracy in each country that are based on evaluating political right and civil liberties

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