
Moderate Islamists: The Effects of Middle-class Civil Society on Islamist Politics in Turkey

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Abstract

Since the founding in 1923 of Turkey, its politics have been characterized by tension between the strong, unified, secular “center” and the weak, scattered, Islamist “periphery.” Structural changes of the 1980s saw the emergence of an Islamist middle class based outside the big cities. That new counter-elite forms the backbone of a popular political movement interested in economic liberalization and cooperation with secularism. Yet the movement also is the focus of a debate: is recent Justice and Development (AK) Party moderation merely a short-term reaction to political circumstances, or does the AK represent a new, enduringly moderate Islamist movement? I argue that middle-class associations have consolidated moderation within the Islamist movement by formulating and articulating shared, pragmatic interests, and by disseminating ideas to the public that are conducive to those interests. An examination of the roles played by two associations—MUSIAD and the Gulen network—shed light on the relationship between civil society and enduring Islamist moderation in Turkey.

On 24 April 2007, the Justice and Development (AK) Party, the ruling party of Turkey, chose a presidential candidate to replace

the president whose term was drawing to a close. Five days later, partly in response to the AK nomination, hundreds of thousands of Turks filled the streets of Istanbul and several other cities in protest. Those participating in these mass rallies sought to uphold Turkey's secular tradition of separating religion from politics. They viewed the AK Party as pro-Islamic and a threat to secular Turkey. In their view, a pro-Islamic presidential appointment, the first in Turkish history, would be a significant step towards Islamization.

The possibility of Islamization in Turkey is a cause of deep concern for many in the West and around the world who have lauded Turkey as the only secular democracy in the Middle East. Turkey, moreover, is referred to as the corridor between Europe and the Middle East. With the prospect of EU accession, Turkey has the potential to play an even more integrative role between East and West. Any fundamental change in Turkey from secularism to Islamism could have grave consequences not only for Turkey but also for much of the world.

The anxieties raised by April's mass rallies beg the question of what the AK Party really represents and whether it poses a danger to secularism in Turkey. Since first gaining political power in a landslide parliamentary victory in 2002, the AK's policies have been widely popular. Central to these policies have been liberal economic and political reforms meant to increase participation in the global economy and to bring Turkey closer to the goal of accession into the European Union. Through five years of continuous reform and popularity, what is conspicuously absent is any real Islamist agenda in the AK's platform. Based on policy analysis, fears of Islamization seem quite overstated.

Despite the seemingly liberal agenda of the AK Party,

however, the fearful sentiments of April's mass rallies are not easily overlooked. The protestors in April were not, after all, voicing opposition to AK policies. Rather, they generally spoke of discontent with the growing influence of Islamists and what this influence might mean for the future of secularism.¹ Regardless of recent policy, the electoral base of the AK Party remains predominantly Islamist, sharing little affinity with the conventional brand of Turkish secularism. Also, as many secularists point out, top AK officials were formerly members of the Islamist parties of the 1990s. Beneath the frequent alarmism of secularist outcry is a more plausible danger: as the AK gains more influence it will gradually push Turkey towards Islamist reform.

The landslide AK Party victory in July 2007, in which many liberal and secular Turks crossed over to vote for the AK, further animated the lingering contention over what the AK represents and what the party means for the future. Its supporters view the AK as representative of a truly democratic "new Turkey" in which widely held Islamic identity plays an active role. The party's detractors, while conceding its success thus far, argue that its moderation is only a short-term reaction to domestic and international politics. While observers argue over Turkey's direction, all agree that the status quo is shifting. The question of vital importance, then, is whether the AK Party is truly a moderate party that is capable and determined to work within the framework of secular democracy. Understood as the latest in a long line of Islamist parties, the AK is also breaking with the past by ceasing to promote an Islamist political agenda. A point of debate is whether that break is permanent. Is the AK Party wearing a temporary mask of moderation, or does it represent modern Turkey's first moderate Islamist movement?

I argue that the AK Party represents a truly moderate movement with roots in the emergence of a new Islamist middle-class that is organized and strengthened by broad social networks. Large-scale economic reforms of the 1980s created economic and associational opportunities for Islamist sectors of the population that had traditionally been excluded by the strong, secular state.

In the socially and economically liberal environment of the 1980s, a new Islamist counter-elite emerged and worked through strong associations that would empower the new elite vis-à-vis the state. With the primary goal of economic growth through liberalization, middle-class associations have been instrumental in the development, articulation, and dissemination of conciliatory political positions believed necessary to reach that goal. Middle-class associations, then, have moderated the Islamist political movement in three ways. First, they have provided forums for the formation of shared interests, allowing members to formulate pragmatic ways to increase their influence. Second, associations have served as platforms for the articulation of pragmatic interests, thus putting pressure on political parties. Third, associations have operated as channels through which a moderate Islamist discourse is disseminated to the public.

The moderating effects of middle-class associations on the Islamist political movement can be measured by analyzing the positions and values formed, articulated, and disseminated by two very influential associations. The first of those associations is the Islamist business association MUSIAD, the foremost associational representative of the emerging Islamist business class. As a socially conservative and Islamic association that represents liberal economic values, MUSIAD's program mirrors that of the AK Party.

The second association is Fethullah Gulen's faith-based movement, which grew in response to the demands of the emerging Islamist middle class and created large educational and media networks. Of special interest are the roles played by the Gulen schools and the movement's popular newspaper, *Zaman*, in formulating and disseminating conciliatory, middle-class interests.

An examination of those institutions will provide a sense of the endurance of moderation within the current Islamist movement in Turkey. If it is true that we are witnessing a transition from a state-centered regime to moderate party politics, as many argue, then recent AK Party victories represent a remarkable development. By shedding light on the forces behind this development we gain an enhanced understanding of an evolving democracy.

Middle Class and Civil Society

In his 1973 article, Serif Mardin outlined a "center-periphery" framework to describe Turkish politics, a framework that others used in the following decades. Mardin applied general center-periphery international development theory singularly to the Turkish political system and emphasized the strength and influence of the unified state apparatus and the corresponding weakness of the heterogeneous population of the "periphery." The "center" consisted of the military, civil servants, economic elites, and others within close proximity and often benefiting from the secular state establishment and was located in Turkey's large Western cities including Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara. By contrast, the periphery, which represented the mass of the population, was located away from the bastions of state influence, mainly in Anatolia, the Turkish inland. The peripheral population was culturally heterogeneous

and scarcely united politically. The masses of the periphery did, however, share one common trait: a strong Islamic identity coupled with a weak affinity with the secular establishment.²

This wide chasm in the Turkish polity had grave consequences for Turkish democracy. On one hand, the political system remained in a state of tension as political parties mobilized peripheral voters to counter state influence. On the other hand, the Islamist periphery remained outside of the system as parties practiced clientelistic machine politics and thus failed to integrate themselves with Islamist society.³

During the 1980s, large-scale socioeconomic changes led to several novel developments that fundamentally changed center-periphery relations and, in the end, undermined the “center-periphery” characterization itself by empowering the periphery. Two key developments were the emergence of an Islamist middle-class and the proliferation of Islamic associations, which, in the aggregate, amounted to a new Islamic civil society.

Under Turgut Ozal’s Motherland Party in the 1980s, the Turkish economy switched from an import-substitution-industrialization model to an export-oriented economy. That change, along with other reforms, opened opportunities for entrepreneurs in the periphery. A 2005 report published by the European Stability Initiative examines socioeconomic changes in the historically underdeveloped Anatolian province of Kayseri, where, in the past generation, industry has grown rapidly within a devoutly Islamic community. In Kayseri, entrepreneurs took advantage of export-friendly economic policies. Furniture producers prospered through modern techniques of production and marketing. Denim producers brought in foreign investment and gained access to Western markets,

with one Turkish firm producing one percent of the world's denim output by 2005. Resembling the economic "tigers" of Southeast Asia, fuelling the rapid development of that region, Islamist businessmen in Turkey came to be known as "Anatolian tigers."⁴

Throughout the periphery, as small and medium-sized business owners prospered, they were able to send their children to college, thus fuelling the growth of the Islamist business class but also creating a new peripheral class of Islamist professionals and intellectuals.⁵ Of significance was the proliferation of Islamic technical schools, including the "Gulen schools," which led to a large increase in professional training.⁶ Thus, the decades following Ozal's reforms witnessed the gradual emergence of a counter-elite consisting of businessmen, professionals, and intellectuals.

In addition to a new middle-class, the large-scale reforms of the 1980s facilitated the growth of Islamic civil society. Civil society, in general, grew immensely during the Ozal years. From 24,272 in 1980, the number of associations and foundations in Turkey grew to 63,641 by 1995.⁷ A great number of these were Islam-affiliated. As part of the reform movement, Ozal oversaw a stronger relationship between the state and Islam, known as the "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis", in which Islam played a greater role in Turkish identity.⁸ Seeing Islam as a useful buffer against socialism and communism, Ozal's government encouraged the creation of new Islamic associations.

Among the most important Islamic associations were the Association of Independent Industrialists and Businessmen, or MUSIAD, and the faith-based social network founded by Fethullah Gulen. These associations are particularly important because they grew largely in accord with the demands of the rising middle

class. As representatives of the middle class, those organs of civil society allowed counter-elites to influence the Islamist political movement by formulating and articulating shared interests, and by disseminating ideas aligned with those interests.

The appearance of an Islamist middle class with strong associational ties signifies a historic stride in Turkey's democratic development. Metin Heper, comparing the political developments of Germany and Turkey, has argued that democracy suffered in Turkey because of a disproportionately strong state vis-à-vis provincial elites. In Germany, according to Heper, a strong aristocracy played an integrating role by providing an intermediary between individuals and the state. Turkey, by contrast, inherited the Ottoman legacy of an all-powerful state and lacked a developed aristocracy. As a result of that disparity, Turkish democracy has experienced too much "distance" between the state and civil society.⁹ Because of the power disparity between center and periphery, state and society failed to establish a *modus vivendi*, or an agreement to live side by side. In short, democracy has been deficient because large segments of Turkish society have had little influence on the political system. But with the emergence of the influential middle class of the periphery, that imbalance is changing. Through middle-class associations, the counter-elite has articulated shared interests and has facilitated wider participation in the political system. Therefore, the middle class, working through intermediary associations, has played the democratizing role that Heper attributed to the old German aristocracy. Indeed, the recent presidential appointment of Abdullah Gul, an economist and the son of a middle-class Kayseri family, represents a historic conciliation between state and society. Moreover, with the middle-class-based AK Party in firm control of

parliament and the presidency, the “center-periphery” framework seems quite obsolete.

Although middle-class associations are important, they are not the *only* source of moderation affecting the Islamist political movement and the AK Party. Domestic and international political events are important. One such event was the military coup of 1997 that forced Necmettin Erbakan out of power and banned his party following accusations of fundamentalism. The memory of that event undoubtedly has pressured Islamists towards conciliation with the state. Another important development has been the prospect of Turkey’s accession to the European Union, which has surely influenced Islamists towards a more pro-Western political platform. But while those factors are important, they fail to fully explain the significance of recent political moderation in Turkey. Overemphasis of the 1997 coup and the EU accession process leads to the conclusion that current moderation is really only temporary—a short-term reaction. One might think that if the military stopped threatening the legitimacy of political parties, or if the EU ceases to take Turkey seriously, then Islamist political moderation will crumble away and the AK will revert to fundamentalism. But the broad and diverse support received by the AK party hints that Turkish society is experiencing a deeper, more enduring shift. While domestic and international political situations might bring about temporary stints of moderation, long-term socioeconomic developments, such as the growth of middle-class associations, have lasting effects. By formulating and articulating pragmatic interests and by disseminating ideas to the public that are conducive to those interests, middle-class associations have provided an enduring moderation to the Islamist political movement.

MUSIAD

MUSIAD is often understood as being synonymous with the new Islamist middle class. M. Hakan Yavuz, a prominent Turkish sociologist, has written, "The transformative history of MUSIAD is the history" of the "new urbanizing economic elite who were steeped in Islamic ethics and networks."¹⁰ In 1990, several pro-Islamic businessmen founded MUSIAD as an organization of small and medium-sized businessmen. From four hundred members in 1991, MUSIAD increased its membership to three thousand firms in 1998, with annual revenue of \$2.79 billion.¹¹ These firms are mostly involved in textiles, construction, services, transportation, and tourism.¹² Through MUSIAD, Islamist elites sought to counter the influence of TUSIAD, the business association of the old elite that comprises executives of Turkey's three hundred largest corporations.

As one of its main roles, MUSIAD serves as a forum for the formulation of shared interests among its mainly middle-class members. In that respect, MUSIAD contributes to an effective public sphere for the new middle-class. The public sphere, as Jurgen Habermas has asserted, "can best be described as a network for communicating information and points of view...the streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified *public* opinions."¹³ In Habermasian terms, associations such as MUSIAD provide forums in which individuals reason with each other in order to form collective interests. Thus, when individuals primarily interested in economic growth come together as MUSIAD, they gradually formulate pragmatic political positions to achieve their goals. In the absence of the process of formulation in the public

sphere, middle-class interests would remain largely heterogeneous, responding only to market and state relations,¹⁴ and would have little influence on the political system.

In formulating shared interests, MUSIAD has shown an impressive capacity for pragmatism, successfully adapting to new domestic and global circumstances. In recent years, for example, MUSIAD has undergone a gradual change in paradigm, growing to embrace pro-Western values. Originally, MUSIAD was slated to create an "Islamic Economic System."¹⁵ For inspiration, MUSIAD looked not to the West but to the East, seeking to create an Islamic economic model similar those so successfully applied in Islamic Southeast Asia.¹⁶ Over time, however, MUSIAD has recognized the benefits of reaching out to the West, and particularly the EU. On one hand, MUSIAD can increase its influence vis-à-vis the state by carving out a new position in the global economic order. On the other hand, the association can utilize the conciliatory Western discourse of democracy and human rights in order to maintain a stable relationship with the state.¹⁷

Therefore, MUSIAD has developed a pro-Western character, and has adopted pro-Western language to describe its policies and aspirations. On its website, the association makes a distinct effort to promote Western values. MUSIAD, the website proclaims, is "dedicated to the realization of a Turkey where human rights and supremacy of the law, justice and equality, peace and security and the welfare and happiness of the people are guaranteed."¹⁸ Moreover, in its public proclamations, MUSIAD repeatedly employs a similar discourse. According to M. Hakan Yavuz, Islamists use EU norms as a "point of reference to create a new social contract in Turkey."¹⁹ Indeed, middle-class Islamists are re-thinking their

position in Turkey and the world, and MUSIAD provides a venue for that process.

Still, while MUSIAD has increasingly embraced the West, it also has worked hard to develop a close relationship with the larger Islamist community in Turkey. It has done that by formulating a new pro-business, "modern" Islamist identity. The 2005 ESI report described how businesses successfully used Islamic identity to mobilize the Islamist community towards economic growth. The development of an Islamic identity conducive to capitalism is understood by many as a novel achievement. As the ESI authors have pointed out, prominent scholars have classically drawn a line of incompatibility between Islam and business.²⁰ Events in Kayseri, as implied by the report, refute old perceptions of Islam and business. Describing the pro-business outlook in Kayseri, the authors labeled the phenomenon "Islamic Calvinism," referring to Max Weber's "Protestant ethic" theory that sought to explain the affinity between the Protestant faith and the rise of capitalism in Europe. They quote the production manager of a local cable factory as saying, "it is good for a religious person to work hard," and that "to open a factory is a kind of prayer." Other interviewees emphasized the character of the Prophet Muhammed as a trader, and refute the dichotomy that polarizes "modern and traditional." The local branch leader of MUSIAD asserted that "the rise of Anatolian capitalists is due to their Protestant work ethic. No personal waste, no speculation, reinvest your profits."²¹

Although some analysts characterize recent Islamic tendencies towards hard work, thrift, and saving as "Calvinist," many Islamists reject the label, preferring instead to attribute those values to Islam itself. For example, when asked about the "Calvinist" label,

MUSIAD General Manager Omer Bolat responded that economic success “is not peculiar to Calvinists. We are presenting the success stories of the Muslim businessmen we call Coma Islamicos.” Bolat continued to argue that “the success of one of our businessmen in Anatolia is not because of the Calvinist doctrine, but because of the Turkish-Islamic ethics and doctrine.”²² While different MUSIAD members prefer different labels, it is clear that they share a common vision of Islam as an economically liberal identity. Despite what MUSIAD members might say, this Islamist identity is fairly new, and MUSIAD, as a public sphere for the middle-class, has played a large role in its construction. This newer identity, in turn, has played a conciliatory role in Turkish society, as Islamists have aimed towards non-confrontational goals of economic growth.

In addition to formulating shared interests for the Islamist middle class, MUSIAD serves as a platform for the articulation of those interests, thus influencing the political system. By articulating the shared interests of the Islamist elite, which are primarily related to economic liberalization, MUSIAD has had a moderating effect on Islamist political parties. The National Outlook Movement (NOM), founded in the 1970s by the charismatic Islamist leader Necmettin Erbakan, was originally a movement of small merchants in the *esnaf* tradition. The rise of the Islamist business class in the 1980s, however, resulted in a shift in priorities for the NOM. In the 1990s, MUSIAD formed a key base of support for the popular Welfare Party (WP), which was the latest NOM political party. Led by Erbakan, the WP responded to the influence of MUSIAD and the Islamist elite in general by adopting an economic policy in favor of global integration. It is likely that MUSIAD also pushed the party towards a more generally pragmatic and conciliatory attitude. Despite its

common reputation as a radical Islamist party, the WP showed an impressive degree of pragmatism.²³

In recent years, MUSIAD has acted as a crucial support base for the AK Party. Upon the nomination of Abdullah Gul for president in April 2007 and the crisis that followed, MUSIAD came out in full support of Gul and the AK Party.²⁴ The AK Party, after all, is often considered the party of the Islamist middle class. If this is truly the case, secularists have little to fear of fundamentalist threats. In any case, MUSIAD serves to reinforce the moderate character of the party by emphasizing economic liberalization and global integration.

In another important moderating role, MUSIAD serves as a channel for the dissemination of ideas that are conducive to the pragmatic interests of the middle class. In order to promote its interests, the middle class needs to appeal to the wider Islamist community. To this end, MUSIAD has sought to mobilize Islamic identity. It has done so, however, by promoting a newly modified Islamist identity with liberal leanings.

Middle-class businessmen, in an effort to strengthen ties with the Islamist community, have propagated a new business-oriented Islamist identity and MUSIAD has served as a major channel for this propagation. M. Hakan Yavuz has cited a MUSIAD pamphlet entitled *Homo Islamicus* that promotes free market capitalism by characterizing the Prophet Muhammed as a merchant. In the pamphlet, MUSIAD seeks to persuade Muslims of the compatibility between Islam and business. Also, MUSIAD propagates "the need for solidarity against a basically hostile socio-political environment."²⁵ Through Islam, MUSIAD seeks to achieve unity and cooperation across classes. Yavuz writes "Islamic identity was not a cause but rather was used as the lubricant to prime the

workings of market forces and as an instrument of carving their share in the market.” While primarily aspiring towards further economic growth, MUSIAD’s position within the historically excluded Islamist periphery necessitates an appeal to Islam on new, economic terms.

In addition to promoting economic growth, MUSIAD has served to disseminate pro-Western liberal discourse among the Islamist population. In this regard, the MUSIAD website and the association’s frequent proclamations are aimed both at fellow middle-class Islamists and at the larger Islamist community. Just as the association formulates the discourse within the Islamist middle class, it also plays an institutional “trend-setting role,” according to Yavuz, and so shapes the larger Islamist political movement. MUSIAD then, has moderated the Islamist political movement in Turkey as an associational representative of Islamist business.

The Gulen Movement

The second association of importance to Islamist moderation in Turkey is that of Fethullah Gulen. Active for some thirty years, Gulen is an intellectual descendant of Said Nursi, one of the preeminent Turkish intellectuals of the twentieth century and the founder of the Nur Movement consisting primarily of reading circles called *dershanes*. Those reading circles, according to M. Hakan Yavuz, acted together as an alternative public sphere, or as a “counter public”²⁶ In the 1970s, Gulen drew inspiration from Nursi’s *dershane* model to establish a network of lighthouses—places where Islamist students lived, socialized, and studied together. Through these institutions, the movement began to build social capital in the forms of solidarity and trust among Islamist students.

The development of social capital early on was a vital stage in the movement's history, as it was able to draw on this resource in later years.²⁷

With the new era of political and economic liberalization under Ozal in the 1980s, the Gulen movement found new opportunities to grow and expand its influence. Gulen's network established strong relationships with growing business organizations. In addition to its lighthouses, the movement founded high schools that emphasized English and natural sciences, earning strong reputations. By 2003, there were three hundred such schools in Turkey.²⁸ Apart from the burgeoning educational network, the Gulen movement established connections with several influential media outlets, including the widely read newspaper *Zaman*.

The Gulen movement, importantly, expanded in the 1980s alongside the new middle class. As Yavuz has observed, the movement comprises "businessmen, teachers, journalists, and students." Yavuz quotes one Turkish writer as saying that Gulen "reveals the aspirations and desires of the new emerging Turkish bourgeoisie, which [has] internalized modern tastes. The Gulen movement, like the emergence of Protestantism within Catholicism along with the help of European bourgeoisie, is evolving from Orthodox Islam."²⁹

The "Gulen Schools" play an important role in formulating shared interests among middle-class Turks. As Gulen's ideas have adapted pragmatically to changing circumstances in Turkey, the schools have followed suit. As middle-class, Islamist students attend these schools in large numbers, the schools form a public sphere in which consensus is formed around non-confrontational Islamism.

Similar to MUSIAD, the Gulen movement has shown a strong capacity to adapt to circumstances and develop new views. Indeed, over time the Gulen educational movement has shifted from traditional Islamic schooling to an emphasis on universal values and technical training. This shift can be attributed, at least partially, to Gulen's own intellectual development and not to the educational network itself. As Bekim Agai has written, however, even Gulen's personal views have been formulated through the schools, as a result of "the rising level of education inside the movement."³⁰

Gulen's concept of the "golden generation" is an example of pragmatic formation of interests within the movement. The main goal of the educational movement, as Gulen has articulated it, is to create a "golden generation" of Turks who are trained both in religion and science.³¹ The idea is to create a new Turkey led by a generation of students who are able to work within the secular system while embracing and promoting Islamic values. In this regard, the Gulen movement has served as a venue in which Islamists develop moderate aims towards peaceful change, or what others have called "conservative revolution."³² Bekim Agai has argued that the idea of the golden generation eventually "transformed from a Turkish Islamic ideal to a universal one" in the 1990s.³³ That adjustment further displays the capacity of the movement to adapt pragmatically to changing circumstances.

As the Gulen network works to formulate shared interests, its media outlets play a vital role in the moderation of Islamist politics by disseminating ideas to the public that are conducive to the shared aims of the movement. Ishan Dagi, a prominent Turkish scholar, has examined the intellectual development of the influential Turkish intellectual Ali Bulac. As one among a

group that Dagi calls the “post-Islamists,” Bulac has changed in recent years from an Islamic focus and a rejection of the West to an embrace of increasingly universal discourses of democracy, human rights, and globalization.³⁴

Significantly, the explanation of Ali Bulac’s relies upon articles published in the Gulen newspaper *Zaman*, for which Bulac is a columnist. As Bulac has formulated new views over time, the public has been an audience to that formulation with *Zaman* as a channel. As Bulac moved towards support for globalization and the EU, for example, the public was able to participate in the shift of paradigm. When Bulac moved towards an embrace of universal, conciliatory values of human rights and democracy, the gradual process of “rethinking” was printed for all to see.

The Gulen movement, then, has pushed the Islamist political movement towards moderation and conciliation with the state. The AK Party, with its goals of empowering the Islamist periphery through economic growth while also reaching a stable relationship with the secular state, seems to share the main aspirations of the Gulen movement. Ihsan Yilmaz has argued that “the emergence of the Justice and Development Party has shown that Muslim politics in Turkey is evolving from an instrumentalist usage of Islam to a new understanding of practicing Muslims who have to deal with daily politics. This evolution is obviously what Gulen has been advocating over the past three decades.”³⁵

Conclusion

Islamist moderation in Turkish politics culminated in a sweeping parliamentary electoral victory for the AK party in July 2007, an outcome interpreted as a message from the populace that

the AK Party is capable of cooperation with the secular state.³⁶

If it is true that the mainstream Islamist political movement in Turkey has moderated and worked as a vehicle for the integration of “peripheral” actors into Turkish democracy, what meaningful observations can we make from this process of democratization? It is clear that several recent developments have worked in the short-term to moderate Islamist politics in Turkey. Political conflict between Islamists and the military during the 1990s undoubtedly influenced the Islamist political movement towards conciliation with the secular state. On the international level, the prospect of EU accession has motivated many Islamists to embrace a pro-Western political platform.

As an explanation of Islamist political moderation in Turkey, domestic and international political developments only tell part of the story. An explanation of moderation leaning solely on these developments leaves the more alarmist of secularist arguments justified. After all, if the recent moderation of the AK Party was solely a reaction to recent, short-term political developments, one could make a strong argument that the AK’s moderation is mainly tactical. Therefore, a focus on the socioeconomic developments underlying the recent moderation of political Islam in Turkey is needed if we are to understand the long-term commitment to moderation among Turkey’s mainstream Islamist political movement.

Islamist middle-class associations have played a vital role in the moderation of the Islamist political movement in Turkey by providing the infrastructure for gradual moderation. With the bourgeois desire for prosperous stability as an impetus, Islamists have sought to empower themselves in relation to the state while simultaneously reaching a *modus vivendi* with Kemalism. Under

the favorable conditions of globalization, in which the state is weakened vis-à-vis supra-national markets and political bodies, middle-class Islamists have aimed towards shrinking the distance between state and society that has inhibited Turkey's democratic development. By working between the state and Islamist society, middle-class associations have both moderated and empowered the periphery, thus bringing Turkey closer to an enduring democracy.

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