Fall 12-2012

The Rise of Religious Parties in Turkey and India

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PSC 205 001
December 6, 2012

What challenges are posed to formally secular states when religious parties grow in power? Studies of late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Turkey and India begin to answer that question. A major tenet on which both countries were founded was secularism, and their constitutions explicitly state that religion and politics should be separate.   Still, millions (and billions, in India's case) of religious adherents call these two countries home. Moreover, both countries have seen the rise of religious political parties in recent years. This poses a problem, as religious and economic minorities have seen their freedoms decrease. For example, anti-religious rhetoric in Turkey is reprimanded, and openly practicing Muslims in India have seen their houses of worship and fellow Muslims attacked. The AKP remains in power today in Turkey, and although the BJP lost control of Parliament to the United Progressive Alliance, headed by the Indian National Congress, the party remains very strong. To what extent do states' formal commitments to secularism constrain these parties from pursuing a religious agenda? Do citizens support these parties solely for religious purposes or do they merely believe they are best to lead their countries economically and socially? What explains the success (and failures) of religious parties in secular democracies? This paper will attempt to answer these questions, while keeping in mind that the rise of religious parties is an ongoing phenomenon whose effects will not be able to be fully explained at the present time.

Why choose these cases? Besides their shared commitment to secularism, Turkey and India differ in history, religious and economic demographics, population size and more. Still, they are both republics founded in the 20th century that have gone through a great deal of technological and economic changes. They have also seen the rise of religion-based parties – the AKP (Turkey, Islam) and the BJP (India, Hinduism) – that have challenged the countries' secular constitutions. Democracies have been emerging in the Middle East and Asia throughout the past

few decades, particularly in countries with large Muslim populations. Insight and advice can be gained from examining these cases as to how new democratic governments can succeed in countries where religion is central to daily life.

The Republic of Turkey is located on the threshold of two different continents, and in some sense, two different worlds. The Turkish government embraced secularism as its national religious policy when Mustafa Kemal Atatürk founded the Republic of Turkey in 1923. Adopting the European concept of identity defined by place and language (as opposed to religion and genealogy), he created "a Turkish identity – a loyalty to a land –" independent of the religious practices of its inhabitants.[1] This associated the modern Turkish Republic with the Western world.

Atatürk also made Turkey similar to the West in another way: neutrality of government to religion. "Atatürk believed secular nationalism was an essential hallmark of modernity and progress."[2] Although ninety-nine percent of Turks are Muslim, the government has tried to remain strictly secular. Along with the founding of the Republic, Atatürk and his administration rid the government of all previous Islamic influences: they "disposed of the governing caliphate, the Arabic alphabet [and] Islamic education."[3] In the eyes of many, Turkey has thrived as a secular democracy: "Of the fifty-one sovereign states that make up the membership of the International Islamic Conference…only one in modern times has passed the more searching test, of a second change of rulers by democratic procedures – of a government willing to submit to the

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[1]   Harold Rhode, "Turkey: Between Ataturk's Secularism and Fundamentalist Islam," *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*, Vol. 9, No. 24 (2012), accessed October 8, 2012, http://jcpa.org/article/turkey-between-ataturk%E2%80%99s-secularism-and-fundamentalist-islam/.

[2]   Roger Hardy, "Islam in Turkey: Odd one out," *BBC News*, September 26, 2003, accessed October 8, 2012, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking_point/3192647.stm.

[3]   Ömer Taşpinar, "Turkey: The New Model?," *Brookings Institution* (April 2012), accessed October 8, 2012, http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2012/04/24-turkey-new-model-taspinar.

will of the people and leave by the self-same route by which it came. That one is the Turkish Republic".[4] In "Why Turkey is the only Muslim Democracy" (written in 1994), Bernard Lewis attributes a myriad of factors to the success of democracy on the Anatolian peninsula. In addition to Turkey's lack of imperial rule by a European country, longstanding connection with the West and fruitful economic growth, Lewis points to Turkey's secular government as a major reason for the country's commitment to democracy. Following the founding of the Turkish Republic, Atatürk implemented "a series of radical measures, including the disestablishment of Islam, the virtual repeal of the Sacred Law (*Shari'a*), and the enactment in their place of civil and criminal codes of a nonreligious character."[5]   Yet after Lewis's article was written, the Turkish government has seen a shift away from secularism and towards Islamism with the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP – *Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi* in Turkish). Atatürk's political philosophy, Kemalism, has come under attack. "The core elements of Kemalism are secularism, nationalism, statism, and identification with Europe. All of these concepts are the subject of lively debate in today's Turkey, and the ruling Justice and Development Party comes from a tradition that challenges many of the Kermalist principles."[6]   As the power and influence of the AKP continues to grow, both Turkish citizens and global observers alike are questioning whether a major shift will occur in Turkey's political ideology. The state of Turkey is definitely changing, and the AKP introduced religious and domestic reforms that have been met with both praise and criticism. As the country moves further into the twenty-first century, will the Turkish government be able to maintain its secular character, or will it cease to be a model of a nonreligious democracy in a strictly Muslim country?

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[4]   Bernard Lewis, "Why Turkey Is the only Muslim Democracy," *The Middle East Quarterly* (March 1994): 41-49, accessed October 2, 2012, http://www.meforum.org/216/why-turkey-is-the-only-muslim-democracy.

[5]   Lewis, "Why Turkey is the."

[6]   Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, US Department of State, "Background Note: Turkey," last modified March 20, 2012, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3432.htm.

The AKP emerged in the early twentieth-first century, but its roots can be traced to the earlier Welfare (Refah) Party, founded in 1983 and banned by the Turkish Constitutional Court in 1998, and the Virtue (Fazilet) Party, founded in 1997 and disbanded in 2001.[7] The AKP's connection to Islam is less overt than the earlier religious parties and has seen more political successes. The AKP currently holds a majority of seats in Parliament – 327 compared to the Republican People's Party (CHP) with 135, the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) with 52, and Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) with 29 seats, and seven independents.[8] It has maintained a majority in Parliament in the last three elections, with the percentages in its favor increasing each time (roughly 34 percent in 2002, 47 percent in 2007 and 50 percent in 2011).[9] Many believe the power of the AKP threatens not only Turkey's secularism but the institution of democracy as a whole. Sami Zubaida of the University of London indicated that "pluralism is now threatened by the repeated electoral successes of the AKP, establishing, in effect, the bases for a majoritarian authoritarianism, at both the institutional and the communal levels."[10] With the success of the AKP only increasing, it does not look like the party will be relinquishing control any time soon. Fears of an authoritarian government cloud the minds of some Turks, despite the fact that the AKP increased protections of civil liberties in some areas (while limiting them in others). Still, the AKP has the support of not only the traditional religious conservatives but also a growing, pious middle class.

Most scholars believe that the AKP came to power not because of its more fundamentalist Islamic roots but because of a desire for change within the Turkish public. After

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[7] Taşpinar, "Turkey: The New Model."
[8] Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, "Background Note."
[9] E. Fuat Keyman and Meltem Müftüler-Baç, "The Era of Dominant-Party Politics," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (January 2012): 85-99, accessed October 3, 2012, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v023/23.1.muftuler-bac.html.
[10] Ofra Bengio, "Are Iraq and Turkey Models for Democratization," *Middle East Quarterly* (Summer 2012): 53-62, accessed October 2, 2012, http://www.meforum.org/3293/iraq-turkey-democratization.

an economic downturn, Turkish citizens yearned for a variation in government. The AKP was

able to deliver that change. "The party's success…has little to do with ideological factors.

Turkish voters have been primarily concerned with bread-and-butter issues…particularly in

health care and housing."[11]   Thus, the success of the AKP may be more accurately attributed to

Turkey's economic growth in the early twenty-first century. "With the economy having tripled

in size since 2002 to become the 15th largest in the world, thanks in part to a significant

expansion of exports to the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia, the AKP won the

support of the Turkish bourgeoisie. From 2001 to 2012, per capita income almost doubled from

$7,350 to $13,577.[12]   The AKP has also made advancements in healthcare, pension systems,

road maintenance and housing construction.[13]   Partly due to these successes, the AKP was re-

elected in 2007 and 2011.[14]   Nonetheless, Turkey's economy began to plummet in 2008-2009; it

has since picked up again. As well, some Turkish citizens are beginning to see past the initial

economic successes of the AKP and question its ideological stances.

There is an apparent tension between the AKP, devout Muslims and secularists in

Turkey. "…The country is polarized between, on the one hand, pious (and sometimes politically

active) Muslims and, on the other, the secular urban elite, which includes the powerful

military."[15] The military, often seen as the safeguard of Turkish secularism, has intervened three

times in the past century when it saw the Turkish government become too religious.

Interestingly, the military has not tried to hold power longer than necessary: "…Unlike other

countries, after the military acted to restore order – as required by Turkey's constitution – it then

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[11]   Taşpinar, "Turkey: The New Model."
[12]   Keyman and Müftüer-Baç, "The Era of Dominant."
[13]   Keyman and Müftüer-Baç, "The Era of Dominant."
[14]   Jean Shaoul, "AKP government moves against Turkish army," *World Socialist Web Site*, September 29, 2012, accessed October 3, 2012, http://www.wsws.org/articles/2012/sep2012/turk-s29.shtml.
[15]   Hardy, "Islam in Turkey."

returned to its barracks."[16]   The AKP reduced the size of the military over the past decade, and

the party's opponents see that as a threat to Turkey's secularism. "They balked…at AKP

measures to increase the ratio of civilians to military officers on the National Security Council,

elect a civilian to head the National Security Council, remove military representatives from the

boards of the Council of Higher Education and the Radio and Television High Council…."[17]

The AKP has also taken legal action against the military and other secularists: "…the Erdogan

government has adroitly exploited the high-profile arrests and mounting public opinion against

the army's involvement in politics…to launch a wider offensive against the military and other

Kemalist institutions. In the last year alone, the AKP government has detained more people,

including journalists, on dubious charges of conspiracy."[18]   Secularists are also wary of the

increased friendliness between Turkey and traditionally Islamic nations like Iran.[19]   They

believe these alliances will lead to increased Islamism in the Turkish government.

Secularists and opponents of the AKP have tried to challenge the political party's power,

but the results have been almost futile. Necdet, a middle-aged Turkish man protesting in the

streets of Istanbul, told *Washington Post* journalist Claire Berlinski in 2007 that he wished the

military to interfere again and root the AKP out of office by claiming that it is "the military's

constitutional role."[20] But does that not threaten the institution of democracy in itself? In order

to defend democracy (and by extension, secularism), some Turkish citizens suggest violating

those very ideals. Berlinski also suggests that the AKP came to power democratically, and that

their current position in Turkish government is in fact the embodiment of democracy and popular

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[16]   Rhode, "Turkey: Between Atatürk's Secularism."
[17]   Taşpinar, "Turkey: The New Model."
[18]   Ehud Toledano, "The AKP's New Turkey," *Hudson Institute*, April 22, 2011, accessed October 8, 2012,
http://www.currenttrends.org/research/detail/the-akps-new-turkey.
[19]   Toledano, "The AKP's New Turkey."
[20]   Claire Berlinski, "In Turkey, a Looming Battle Over Islam," *The Washington Post*, May 6, 2007, accessed
October 8, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/04/AR2007050402564.html.

sovereignty. Ömer Taşpinar of the Woodrow Wilson Center agreed with Berlinski's sentiment, suggesting that "a tradition of free and fair elections and capitalism [in Turkey] has encouraged Islamic parties to play by the rules."[21] Even so, New York Times journalist Thomas L. Friedman believes that the true character of the AKP will not be tested until another political party takes over the majority. Arguing against Turkey being used as a model of a functioning Islamic democracy, Friedman stated that he "will only cite the AKP as a reassuring example of Islam and democracy in harmony after [he sees] it lose an election and vacate power."[22] Still, the problem in Turkey regarding politics and religion is very evident and relevant. A proportion of the population is not happy with the current government's Islamic ties and is willing to take action.

Along with the rise of the AKP in Turkish politics, religious influence in other areas of society is growing. One major area is education, especially at the primary level. There is a divide between secularists and a middle class of pious Muslims over the role of Islam in public schools.[23] In 2012, Koran lessons were implemented. This led to an outcry among secularists, who claim that "the emphasis on religious education is part of a controversial overhaul of the national curriculum, which many argue flies in the face of the rigidly secular principles of Kemal Atatürk."[24] Another area affected by the rise of Islamism is women's rights. Some secularists think that women are slowly seeing their freedoms decline and believe Erdoğan's policies depart from Turkey's more progressive past, especially in regard to family values and gender equality.[25] Prime Minister Erdoğan would like to ban all abortions, believing the practice akin to murder.

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[21] Taşpinar, "Turkey: The New Model."

[22] Thomas L. Friedman, "Trust, but Verify," *The New York Times*, January 17, 2012, accessed October 10, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/18/opinion/trust-but-verify.html?_r=0.

[23] Thomas Seibert, "Secularists: Government plan favours Islamic schools in Turkey," *The National*, March 11, 2012, accessed October 2, 2012, http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/secularists-government-plan-favours-islamic-schools-in-turkey.

[24] "Peddling religion: Why secular academics fret about an 'Islamic bicycle,'" *The Economist*, September 15, 2012, accessed October 6, 2012, http://www.economist.com/node/21562945.

[25] Taşpinar, "Turkey: The New Model."

Abortion became legal in Turkey in 1983, and ten percent of Turkish pregnancies end in abortion (which is relatively low compared to the thirty percent of pregnancies ended by abortion in Europe).[26] In addition, religious headscarves worn by women are becoming a more common occurrence on the street, and this topic has become a subject of dispute. "Muslim women argue that wearing a headscarf is a human right and a religious duty. Secularists see the headscarf as a provocative political symbol, and have managed to get it banned from universities, state schools and government ministries."[27] The AKP has also increased censorship towards anti-Islamic remarks. In June, classical and jazz pianist Fazil Say was charged "with insulting Islamic values in Twitter messages, the latest in a series of legal actions against Turkish artists, writers and intellectuals for statements they have made against religion and Turkish national identity."[28] While he believes his human rights were violated, the self-declared atheist could face up to eighteen months in prison. Clearly, speaking out against Islam or the government is not tolerated by the AKP. Freedom of speech, a staple of ideal democracies, is curtailed in Turkey.

Like Turkey, the power of religious parties has expanded in India in recent decades. However, in contrast to Turkey, Indian religious parties have been arguably less successful in maintaining control. The Indian Republic was founded in 1947, when the former colony broke free of British rule and established a democracy. India's diversity in both religion and socioeconomics has resulted in a myriad of political parties. The most dominant party has been the Indian National Congress, the party of Mohandas K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. From 1947 until 1998, Congress almost always controlled the Indian Parliament. Nonetheless, new

[26] Arash Ahmadi, "Turkey PM sparks row over abortion," *BBC News*, June 1, 2012, accessed October 10, 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-18297760.
[27] Hardy, "Islam in Turkey."
[28] Sebnem Arsu and Daniel J. Wakin, "Turkish Pianist Is Accused of Insulting Islam," *New York Times*, June 1, 2012, accessed October 8, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/02/world/europe/turkey-charges-pianist-fazil-say-over-twitter-posts.html?_r=0.

parties were emerging, most notably the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This occurrence can partially be attributed to the theory of political development, a phenomenon in which voters' attitudes towards politics evolve as they become more educated. As India modernized, voters became more politically diverse. This benefited the BJP: "It has been well documented that in societies where there are diverse ethnic groups marked by a rural-urban gap, modernization affects groups unevenly. In such instances, political parties that can mobilize support in all sectors of society usually end up with electoral successes."[29] The party was gradually able to attract various groups' support. Despite the party's coalition not constituting a majority in Parliament until 1998, the BJP began mobilizing its supporters long before then.

Although its coalition did not attain the majority in Parliament until 1998, the BJP began gaining power throughout the second half of the 20th century. A major aspect of the BJP's platform is its commitment to *Hindutva*, or Hindu Nationalism. Unlike the secular Congress, "the country's radical nationalists view the secular political system as a threat to Hindu identity, largely in view of the power it offers India's 240 million Muslims. Weakening, or even abolishing, the secular state has become part of the radical nationalist agenda."[30] Nonetheless, the BJP's main motivation was political. With the Indian National Congress weakened, the BJP and rival political parties looked for ways to mobilize the masses. In the case of the BJP, religion was used as a means of mobilization: "The BJP is pragmatic and even opportunistic, manipulating religious symbols, monuments, ideas, and personalities in the quest for political office. By employing these strategies, the party has mobilized the masses, reconceptualizing

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[29]   Rekha Datta, "Hindu Nationalism or Pragmatic Party Politics? A Study of India's Hindu Party," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (1999), accessed November 17, 2012, http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.helin.uri.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=128ab7aa-8666-4c89-a917-108d570c2e1a%40sessionmgr115&vid=5&hid=102.
[30]   Sharif Shuja, "India's 2004 Elections: Implications for the Future," *National Observer*, No. 63(Summer 2005): 30-35, accessed November 17, 2012, http://www.nationalobserver.net/2005_summer_108.htm.

Hinduism and conflating it with an extravagant type of Indian nationalism."[31] Rehka Datta

described this religious nationalism as "a political and practical necessity."[32] The BJP

recognized the needed for a resurgence of nationalism in order to gain office and used Hinduism

as a means of to that goal.

Fundamentalist Hindus support the BJP in masses, especially those of higher castes. A

1993 study of Indian party activists reveals that fifty-nine percent of BJP activists identify as

religious (meaning they pray, attend religious meetings and go to temple), compared to twenty

percent of their Congress counterparts.[33] BJP members were also more likely to see their

religion (Hinduism) as different from other religions. However, religious devotees were not the

only contingent to vote for the BJP: "There is little in the way of substantive evidence, however,

that Hindus have either become more religious or that they were willing to express their

religiosity more politically…the BJP was electorally successful on account of its ability to forge

a coalition between religious groups and the middle classes."[34] The middle class largely

supported the BJP because of the party's economic reforms. A new "coalition" of sorts was

formed between religious fundamentalists and the financially-motivated middle class.

Positioning itself as the party of laissez-faire economics, the BJP "emerged in the 1990s as an

ardent critic of state intervention. It was this programmatic shift which enabled the BJP to

garner the support of the middle classes, who were 'mobilizable' because of their growing

disaffection with the political and economic policies pursued by the Congress Party."[35] The BJP

also capitalized on a growing anti-Western sentiment and advocated economic policies different

[31]   Datta, "Hindu Nationalism or Pragmatic."
[32]   Datta, "Hindu Nationalism or Pragmatic."
[33]   Pradeep Chibber, "Who voted for the Bharatiya Janata Party?," *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 27,
No. 4 (October 1997): 631-639, accessed November 18, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/194232.
[34]   Chibber, "Who voted for the Bharatiya."
[35]   Chibber, "Who voted for the Bharatiya."

from those of the Western powers. The Party's official platform stated: "'A modern India, to the BJP, is not a Westernized India.' In essence, the BJP government welcomes privatization, foreign investment, and self-reliance and does not seek to debar foreign firms in the name of economic nationalism."[36]

Despite support from the middle class, the BJP does not garner the votes of the entire Hindu contingent. India's caste system has its roots in Hinduism, and this organization of people based on birth and class marginalizes many Indians. Even though the BJP is a religious party, not all religious Hindus would benefit under its rule. Those in the higher castes are much better off. Thus, "the strongest influence on voting preference is observed in terms of class division…the BJP is highly preferred among the middle class and rich SC's (scheduled castes)."[37] In the 1998 elections, the votes the BJP did receive from members of scheduled castes came more so from those in the upper class (22.75 percent of the SC vote) than the middle and lower classes (10 percent of the vote).[38] This makes sense; even though members of the scheduled castes are automatically put at a disadvantage under Hindutva, those of the upper class benefit more from the economic politics of the BJP. Pushpendra even suggested the BJP could be labeled as "not only a party of the caste Hindus, but also as a party of the upper class cutting across all caste groups."[39] Overall, by advocating a Hindu Nationalism the BJP is suggesting that those of lower castes are unequal to those of higher castes.

The alienation of non-Hindus, especially Muslims, in addition to the economically disadvantaged is another reason attributed to the BJP's loss in the 2004 election. Indian Muslims

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[36]   Datta, "Hindu Nationalism or Pragmatic."
[37]   Pushpendra, "Dalit Assertion through Electoral Politics," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, No. 36 (September 4, 1999): 260-2618, accessed November 5, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4408373.
[38]   Pushpendra, "Dalit Assertion."
[39]   Pushpendra, "Dalit Assertion."

believe their freedom is threatened by the BJP.   India's electoral system (plurality or first-past-the-post) makes it difficult for Muslims representatives to win seats in Parliament in states other than Jammu and Kashmir, where they account for a majority of the population. Even so, representatives in Lok Sabha (the Lower House of the Indian Parliament) from Jammu and Kashmir are not uniformly Muslim: the state's members are split between Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists.[40] The Muslim representation in Lok Sabha is not proportional to the Muslim population in India as a whole; contrastingly, Jains, Sikhs and Christians are represented in government at a fairly accurate percentage. This may be a result of the concentration of minority religions in specific regions of India.

The BJP has never been a party in which many Muslims feel welcome. "Its politics of Hindu nationalism has thrived on demonizing the Muslim (and occasionally Christian) minority, on the view that minorities are not entitled to special rights."[41] A major issue of contention in Indian history was the 1992 destruction of a Muslim mosque in Ayodhya.[42] Many actually believe that this act was prompted by BJP leaders. Today, the BJP and its supporters wish to build a Hindu temple at the site, and Muslims are not pleased. Not only has this angered Muslims, but Hindu Indians who yearn for peace are also distraught. After an attack on Gujarat Muslims in 2002 that resulted in 2,000 deaths, the BJP's opponents reached their breaking points.[43] Former Prime Minister Vajpayee's failure to reprimand the offenders lost the party support from others, including "the 21 coalition partners, media and vibrant Indian civil society

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[40]   Niraja Gopal Jayal, "A Malevolent Embrace? The BJP and Muslims in the Parliamentary Elections of 2004," *India Review*, Vol.3, No. 3 (July 2004), accessed November 17, 2012, http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.helin.uri.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=4&hid=22&sid=f5f9a531-b460-4cd5-9db3-5c8033b0658a%40sessionmgr14.

[41]   Jayal, "A Malevolent Embrace?"

[42]   Francis Gonsalves, "India votes for secularism," *National Catholic Reporter*, May 28, 2004, accessed November 17, 2012, http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.helin.uri.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=8a64ac69-59d8-4669-922d-f1f8d92a4428%40sessionmgr113&vid=4&hid=102.

[43]   Shuja, "India's 2004 Elections."

organisations."[44] Yet the BJP still won elections at the state level, and Chief Minister Narendra Modi of Gujarat was reelected. This exemplifies the disparity that can occur between state and national levels of government within a country.

The BJP-led coalition lost majority control in Parliament in 2004 to Congress's United Progressive Alliance. *National Catholic Reporter* journalist Francis Gonsalves suggested that Indian voters chose Congress over the BJP "for basic needs – *rota-kapda-makaan* (food, clothing and housing) – over economic liberalism."[45] This is similar to Turkey – many voters supported the AKP not because of its Islamist background but because of its ability to provide basic goods and services to the public. Despite the illusion of an economic boom, Congress attacked the BJP for covering up unexpected financial disappointments: "It highlighted the first-time negative employment growth that the country had seen during the N.D.A. years, with unemployment crossing the 10 million mark…[Congress was] maintaining that during the N.D.A.'s five-year rule, the growth rate was just five percent."[46] Moreover, the so-called "shining" of India during the BJP years did not reach all people: "India's resurgence, unfortunately, failed to reach the hundreds of millions living in poverty in rural areas, where electricity, jobs and clean water are luxuries. It was rural Indians who voted in decisive numbers, not the urban upper class that has been the main winner from the boom."[47] Still, Gonsalves asserts that religious fundamentalism was the BJP's main undoing. Even religious Hindus yearned for peace, and there was not peace in a country where the rights of lower classes and Muslims were marginalized.

Even though Congress leads the majority coalition, the United Progressive Alliance, in India's current Parliament, the BJP remains strong. In order to attract more widespread support,

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[44]   Shuja, "India's 2004 Elections."
[45]   Gonsalves, "India votes for."
[46]   Shuja, "India's 2004 Elections."
[47]   Shuja, "India's 2004 Elections."

the BJP has "decided to strive for an 'imaginative reprojection' of its 'commitment to secularism.'"[48] Congress representative Renuka Chowdhary called the BJP's bluff. She argues that the party affirms its pledge to secularism in order to receive votes. There is still an ongoing battle for majority control between Congress's United Progressive Alliance and the BJP's National Democratic Alliance.

The AKP and BJP currently have a strong presence in the Turkish and Indian governments. Their connection to religion has been downplayed with both words and actions. An abandonment of religious rhetoric in favor of more secular terms permeated both the Refah Party (RP, the AKP's religious predecessor) and the BJP's platforms upon their initial election to office. Distancing themselves from the more radical religious parties that came before, "both parties adopt[ed] a moralistic tone and [were] adept at using some of the buzzwords of liberal politics like 'civil society', 'pluralism' and 'social consensus' even when denouncing and distancing themselves from the established 'system'."[49] Still, authors Nitish Dutt and Eddie J. Girdner argue that this was not necessary because religious rhetoric is only threatening to the institution of democracy when it is put into action. Moreover, the absence of religious rhetoric has not always proved successful. The Refah Party changed its name to the Virtue (*Fazilet*) Party to distance itself from Islam but was still removed from power by the Turkish military in 1997.[50] Furthermore, Prime Minister Erdoğan "crafted the term conservative democracy – rather than an Islamic reference – to explain his political agenda."[51]   Despite these efforts, the AKP is

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[48]   "Congress questions BJP commitment to secularism," *The New Indian Express*, September 29, 2012, accessed November 18, 2012, http://newindianexpress.com/nation/article1278337.ece.
[49]   Nitish Dutt and Eddie J. Girdner, "Challenging the rise of nationalist-religious parties in India and Turkey," *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2000): 7-24, accessed November 19, 2012, http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.helin.uri.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&hid=22&sid=d8085775-13e5-42c0-8088-f13ca03ec9c4%40sessionmgr12.
[50]   Dutt and Girdner, "Challenging the rise."
[51]   Taşpinar, "Turkey: The New Model."

still referred to as Turkey's "Islamist Party." Religious parties also appeal to political tradition in India in order to attract support. The BJP-sponsored 500-mile march not only garnered Hindu backing but connected the BJP with Gandhi's movement against British colonial rule (an undertaking that was entirely secular). The opposite has been true for the AKP in Turkey. Separating themselves from both Atatürk's strict secularism and previous religious parties' extreme Islamism, the AKP seeks to find a balance between religion and government.

The changing rhetoric is not all for show – both the AKP and BJP have actually moderated in some aspects. Referring again to the RP and BJP, Dutt and Girdner stated that the parties were willing to moderate in order to gain political support: "This fact is clearly demonstrated by the RP's 1996 efforts to form a coalition government, and the BJP's pre-1999 electoral urgency to form alliances with other regional parties regardless of the fact that none of the even remotely identified with its brand of religious nationalism."[52] They value political opportunism over religious devotedness. Nonetheless, the BJP in particular has struggled with finding a balance between moderation and staunch religiosity. The party's candidate for Prime Minister in 2009, L. K. Advani, was a former fundamentalist who tried to reshape his image as a moderate in order to appeal to a wider range of voters. He was unsuccessful, and a fellow member of his party said he failed because he was "neither fully center nor totally right."[53] Neither the stalwartly religious nor true moderates completely identified with Advani. Like the BJP, the AKP's ideology has also shifted towards the center – instead of emphasizing Islam as

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[52]   Dutt and Girdner, "Challenging the rise."
[53]   Rama Lakshmi, "India's Hindu Party Reflects on Election Drubbing," *The Washington Post*, May 18, 2009, accessed December 4, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/17/AR2009051702212.html.

the main philosophy guiding the party, the AKP strives towards democracy, national will, people

power and economic development.[54]

One of the specific factors encouraging the moderation of political parties is the necessity

for coalition governments. Coalition governments are a facet of parliamentary democracy that

can either weaken or strengthen the power of religious parties. They have become more

conventional in India throughout the past few decades, and although they still exist in Turkey,

they have become less common since the early 2000s. Turkish political parties have faced

struggles in forming successful coalition governments, although groups like the Welfare Party

(Refah Party or RP) were open to forming coalitions in the late 1990s. To the RP's

disadvantage, coalitions initially formed to keep the Islamic party out of power. While having

the most number of seats in Parliament (158 out of 550), the Welfare Party did not constitute a

majority.[55] Afraid of the RP pursuing a potential religious agenda, former enemies Mesut

Yilmaz of the Motherland Party and Tansu Ciller, the Prime Minister and leader of the True Path

Party, decided to join forces.[56] Refah leader Necmettian Erbakan chastised this move, calling the

new government "an abnormal creature born from a forced marriage."[57] He correctly predicted

inevitable governmental chaos. Erbakan would go on to become Prime Minister after forming an

alliance with the True Path Party only to be removed by the Turkish military a year later. In

India's case, the BJP was forced to join with secular parties in order to gain a majority in

Parliament. This forced the BJP to moderate. In some instances, however, the party did not

moderate enough. After failing to reprimand the Hindu nationalists who murdered some 2,000

[54]   Ihsan Dagi, "Turkey's AKP in Power," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (July 2008): 25-30, accessed November 18, 2012, muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v019/19.3.dagi.pdf.
[55]   Sami Kohen, "Turkey's Shaky Coalition Keeps Islamic Party Out," *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 4, 1996, accessed February 21, 2013, http://www.csmonitor.com/1996/0304/04061.html.
[56]   Kohen, "Turkey's Shaky Coalition."
[57]   Kohen, "Turkey's Shaky Coalition."

Gujarat Muslims in 2002, the BJP lost the support of many of its coalition partners. This

partially led to the BJP's removal from power in 2004. Still, the BJP attempted to court Muslim

politicians. While Congress was seen as the de facto party for Muslim voters (as Congress

championed minority privileges), the BJP began actively courting Muslim politicians in the late

1990s. Already underrepresented with Congress in power, some politicians defected to the BJP.

Given the chance, they hoped to influence and alter the party's stance on Muslims' role in Indian

society. Rationalizing his decision to join the BJP (which was gaining in political power),

Muslim leader Arif Mohammed Khan said "Suddenly I realised the BJP is telling me 'you come

into the party, we want to correct the distortions in our image, we want to take everyone

along'…They are extending their hand, they say they want to correct the situation. We have to

catch hold of this extended hand."[58] It is worth noting the Khan has since left the BJP and is

now a leader of the rival Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). Moreover, although 35 Muslim candidates

won office in the 2004 election, no Muslim candidate was elected to the Fourteenth Lok Sabha in

2004 from the BJP.[59]

The successes and failures of religious parties in Turkey and India often go hand-in-hand

with the countries' standards of living. Even though some sects of Indian society were thriving,

"the United Nation's 2003 human development report calculated that 47 per cent of Indian

children under the age of five were under weight. An estimated 300 million Indians survive on

less than $1 a day, and 160 million lack access to clean water."[60] The BJP has not been able to

provide necessitates to Indians of all castes, religions and geographic locales. Contrastingly, the

AKP was able to adequately make available the "bread-and-butter" materials and services to

[58]   Jayal, "A Malevolent Embrace?"
[59]   Jayal, "A Malevolent Embrace?"
[60]   Shuja, "India's 2004 Elections."

Turks of all classes. This is arguably the main reason why the party keeps getting reelected.

Before becoming Prime Minister, Erdoğan was the mayor of Istanbul. During his tenure, he put

emphasis on local improvements instead of sweeping reforms. He learned that "local voters

want efficient road and sewer repair and trash collection, not utopian endeavors to transform

society."[61] His pragmatic approach to his mayoral duties transferred to his role as Prime

Minister. As evidenced by the repeated victories of the AKP and the defeat of the BJP in 2004,

the rise and fall of religious parties has to do at least partly with the parties' performances in

areas outside of religion.

The relationship between religion and government differs in Turkey and India. Religion

is taboo in Turkish government. With the rise of the AKP has come a limit on free speech, both

religious and secular. Citizens who criticize the government are at risk of unemployment or even

imprisonment. For example, columnist Ali Akel was fired from her reporting job with the pro-

government newspaper *Yeni Safak* in February 2012 for attempting to write a piece critical of the

Prime Minister's position on the Kurds.[62] This issue has resulted in longstanding tensions in

Turkish society. The sharp divide between the Turkish military and ruling party also splits the

country. Former head of the Turkish armed forces Gen Ilker Basburg explained the strain

between the two factions:

> [It] reflects a deep hostility and suspicion between two poles of Turkey's society
> and political establishment. On the one hand members of Turkey's military elite
> and their allies see themselves as custodians of Turkey's secular constitution…On
> the other hand Prime Minister Erodogan and his supporters argue his government
> – popularly elected – represents modern democratic Turkey, tolerant of moderate

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[61]   Dagi, "Turkey's AKP in Power."
[62]   Mehdi Hasan, "In Turkey the right to free speech is being lost," *The Guardian*, June 10, 2012, accessed
December 4, 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jun/10/turkey-free-speech-
erdogancrackdown/print.

Islam, and must protect itself from those seeking a return to Turkey's past history of military coups and shadowy army influence.[63]

The balance between religion and government in both the press and the institution itself is still disputed in Turkey. This differs in India, where citizens and government officials are free to express their opinions about religion. Religion has an impact on some government officials' decisions, and to some extent that is acceptable. Instead, tension arises in India when people use their religion to marginalize others.

At this point in time, it cannot be disputed that religious parties can exist in Turkey and India without the undermining of democracy. But because the AKP and BJP are relatively new to power, the question of whether they will last cannot be answered. Previous religious parties in Turkey have fallen, but those were much more overtly Islamist than the AKP. It is clear that religious parties exist not solely for their religious commitments but because of their economic reforms and ability to provide necessities to citizens. Oftentimes, it is the persistence of economic problems that leads to the downfall of religious parties. This is not to suggest that religious fervor does not matter – it is still quite important. The military in Turkey and the voters in India and Turkey play a role in constraining religious parties' fundamentalism. Voters can limit parties from pursuing a religious agenda (and violating their respective constitutions) by voting them out in the following election. In Turkey, the military oftentimes removes parties it feels are too religious before any new election can take place. There is tension between the AKP and the Turkish military, but the military has seen its powers restricted under the AKP and thus has not been able to remove the party from office. As Turkey and India continue to grow, it is certain that religion and its appropriate role in government will remain issues of contention.

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[63]   Bridget Kendall, "Q&A: Turkey's military and the alleged coup plots," *BBC News*, April 4, 2012, accessed December 4, 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-16447625.

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