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Balancing Hope and Fear: Muslim Modernists, Democracy, and the Tyranny of the Majority

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Abstract

During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, many Muslim modernists exhibited mixed records regarding democracy. On the one hand, they articulated cogent arguments that Islam was, at its heart, democratic in nature and worked to counter Islamist claims to the contrary. Some crafted robust visions for Islamic democratic governance. On the other hand, many of the same modernists forged political alliances with military authoritarian regimes. How can we explain this seeming inconsistency between modernist democratic ideals and their not-so-democratic practices? This article argues that this paradoxical pattern stems from a classic dilemma within democratic theory: the tyranny of the majority. After providing a brief history of majoritarian fears in Western political theory, the article investigates two prominent case studies from mid-twentieth-century Pakistan and Indonesia. The first examines Fazlur Rahman's ties to Ayub Khan's military regime in 1960s Pakistan, and the second analyzes why a movement of young modernists was willing to collaborate with Suharto's New Order regime in 1970s Indonesia. Together, the two cases demonstrate that Muslim modernists balance their genuine hopes for an Islamic democratic future with persistent fears of majoritarian tyranny by advocating for constraints on the majority will. While these constraints can be controversial and even authoritarian in nature, they have important parallels in Western democratic thought. Ultimately, this article argues that Muslim modernists' mixed records are a function of democratic theory itself rather than some Islamic exception to it.

Keywords: Islamic modernism; Muslim modernists; tyranny of the majority; democracy; authoritarianism; Fazlur Rahman; Nurcholish Madjid; Pakistan; Indonesia

Twenty years after Pakistan achieved its independence, Fazlur Rahman (1919–1988) added his voice to the country's cacophonous debate over Islam and democracy. He took particular aim at Islamist arguments that the sovereignty of God trumped the sovereignty of the people. Pushing back against that reasoning, he declared, "The state organization in Islam receives its mandate from the people, i.e. the Muslim

community, and is therefore necessarily democratic."[1] Rahman elaborated on this vision for Islamic democracy. He argued that the Qur'an, at its heart, preaches human equality and autonomy. He also made repeated calls to lift elitist restrictions on legal interpretation and to reinvigorate the Islamic principles of consultation and consensus. Rahman was undoubtedly one of the most important proponents of Islamic democracy in 1960s Pakistan. Yet, he spent most of that decade serving the military authoritarian regime of Ayub Khan. He cultivated a close relationship with the general-turned-president and for six years even ran Khan's religious think tank, the Islamic Research Institute. Why was Rahman, the same Muslim intellectual who characterized Islam as "completely democratic," so willing and even eager to work for a military autocrat?[2] How could he champion democracy and at the very same time lend his voice to an authoritarian government?

Curiously, Rahman is not the only Muslim modernist who possesses such a seemingly inconsistent record regarding Islam and democracy.[3] Many others seem stuck between pro-democratic theories and authoritarian political practices. In the early 2000s, a second generation of Pakistani modernists, led by Javed Ahmad Ghamidi (b. 1952), found common cause with a military regime. Like Rahman, Ghamidi was a well-known critic of Islamism and advocate for Islamic democracy, and yet, he chose to collaborate with General Pervez Musharraf's government under the post-9/11 banner of "Enlightened Moderation."[4] Further east in Indonesia, Islamic modernism thrived under Suharto's authoritarian New Order government. Suharto appointed modernists to high-ranking bureaucratic posts and fostered a modernist culture in the nation's Islamic higher education system. As a result, many important Indonesian modernists, including Mukti Ali, Munawir Sjadzali, Harun Nasution, Nurcholish Madjid, and Djohan Effendi, forged close ties with the New Order state, even as they articulated Islamic arguments for equality, free expression, and democracy.[5]

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[1] Fazlur Rahman, "Implementation of the Islamic Concept of State in the Pakistani Milieu," *Islamic Studies* 6, 3 (1967): 205–33, 205.

[2] Ibid., 209.

[3] I define "Islamic modernism" as a loosely affiliated movement of scholars and activists who share two foundational commitments: First, they view Islam as a dynamic religion and therefore reject *taqlid*, or adhering to interpretative precedent within one's school of Islamic law. Modernists instead endorse *ijtihad*, or deriving fresh interpretations from the Qur'an and Sunnah, as the primary way to ensure Islam's contemporary relevance. Second, modernists tend to approach Islam and Western-style modernity as compatible rather than antagonistic ways of life. For similar definitions of Islamic modernism, see: Charles Kurzman, *Modernist Islam, 1840–1940: A Source Book* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3–27; and Roxanne Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 5–9.

[4] For more on Muslim modernists and Pakistani military regimes, see Sadaf Aziz, "Making a Sovereign State: Javed Ghamidi and 'Enlightened Moderation,'" *Modern Asian Studies* 45, 3 (2011): 597–629; Ali Usman Qasmi, "God's Kingdom on Earth? Politics of Islam in Pakistan, 1947–1969," *Modern Asian Studies* 44, 6 (2010): 1197–253; Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Islam in Pakistan: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 54–94.

[5] For more on Muslim modernists and Suharto's New Order, see Megan Brankley Abbas, *Whose Islam? The Western University and Modern Islamic Thought in Indonesia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021), 92–200; Fachry Ali and Bahtiar Effendy, *Merambah Jalan Baru Islam: Rekonstruksi Pemikiran Islam Indonesia Masa Orde Baru* (Bandung: Mizan, 1986); R. Michael Feener, *Muslim Legal Thought in Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 118–50; Muhammad Kamal Hassan, *Muslim Intellectual Responses to "New Order" Modernization in Indonesia* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan

Scholarly observers respond to the seeming inconsistency between Muslim modernists' democratic visions and their not-so-democratic political practices in several ways. Intellectual historians tend to downplay, or altogether ignore, their authoritarian alliances and focus instead on their progressive ideas about Islamic history and scriptural interpretation.[6] Whether driven by methodological priorities or an underlying desire to celebrate modernists as "good liberals," this approach overlooks the relationship between scholarly ideas and practical politics. A second group focuses on how military regimes use a combination of manipulation and political force to co-opt Muslim modernists. This explanation foregrounds state machinations at the expense of Muslim modernists' own political and intellectual agency.[7] A third set views modernists' collaboration as a strategic compromise that ensures their political relevance and ability to pursue long-term modernist reforms when authoritarian regimes are the only game in town.[8] While each of these approaches has its merits, all three sidestep the real possibility that Islamic modernism exhibits what Muhammad Qasim Zaman terms "an authoritarian streak."[9] As evidence of this, Zaman points to not only modernist political choices but also their penchants for strongmen and top-down reform of what they see as recalcitrant Islamic institutions.

Building on Zaman's work, this article interrogates how Muslim modernists can possess both an undeniable record of democratic advocacy and an authoritarian streak. I resist the temptation to dismiss the tension as either an incomprehensible contradiction or evidence of personal hypocrisy and instead seek to understand its intellectual roots in democratic theory itself. Specifically, I argue that Muslim modernists repeatedly run into a classic dilemma within democratic theory: the tyranny of the majority. Modernists certainly endorse the sovereignty of the people as an Islamic imperative, but they also fear its potential excesses. What happens if the masses make poor or even dangerous decisions? What if the majority attacks vulnerable minorities? In an effort to balance their democratic hopes and these majoritarian fears, Muslim modernists have imagined innovative ways to constrain potentially tyrannical majorities. Admittedly, some of their constraints resemble the tools that autocrats and other political elites use to legitimize their rule and preserve their power. While this overlap is troubling, intellectual history helps us to see that anti-majoritarian constraints belong to both democratic and authoritarian toolboxes. For centuries, democratic theorists have thus struggled to calibrate their use of these

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Pustaka, 1980); Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 94–166.

[6]For a sampling of such work on my two case studies, see Ali Akbar, "Fazlur Rahman's Influence on Contemporary Islamic Thought," *Muslim World* 110 (2020): 148–51; Jon Armajani, "Islam and Democracy in the Thought of Fazlur Rahman and Sayyid Abu'l-A'la Mawdudi," in Ingrid Mattson, Paul Nesbitt-Larking, and Nawaz Tahir, eds., *Religion and Representation: Islam and Democracy* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 37–49; Greg Barton, "Neo-Modernism: A Vital Synthesis of Traditionalist and Modernist Islamic Thought in Indonesia, *Studia Islamika* 2, 3 (1995): 1–76; Fauzan Saleh, *Modern Trends in Islamic Theological Discourse in Twentieth Century Indonesia* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 240–94.

[7]Donald Porter, *Managing Politics and Islam in Indonesia* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002), 38–75; M. C. Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural, and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012), 150–62.

[8]Ali and Effendi, *Merambah Jalan Baru Islam*, 95–105; Hassan, *Muslim Intellectual Responses*, 78–116; Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 113–21.

[9]Zaman, *Islam in Pakistan*, 54.

tools so they can prevent majority tyranny without slipping into authoritarianism. It is an exceedingly difficult balancing act that, when recognized in the Muslim modernists' cases, explains their mixed records on democracy.

My argument unfolds in three parts. First, I explore how fears of a tyrannical majority shaped Western democratic theorizing and gave rise to a series of constitutional and cultural constraints on majority power. Part Two investigates how Fazlur Rahman, arguably the most prominent modernist of the late twentieth century, supplemented his vision for an ideal Islamic democracy with certain long- and short-term proposals to prevent majoritarian tyranny in Pakistan. Part Three travels to Indonesia to examine how, in the early 1970s, a movement of young modernists followed their democratic commitments to free expression and their fears of social tyranny all the way into an alliance with a decidedly authoritarian regime. Ultimately, this comparative analysis illuminates how the tyranny of the majority produces painful paradoxes for democratic theorists not only in the West but in the Islamic world as well.

The Tyranny of the Majority in Western Political Theory

The specter of a tyrannical majority has long haunted Western political theory. As a term, "tyranny of the majority" refers to the fear that the majority may exercise its power to such an unbridled extent that it tramples on minority rights and hence threatens the democratic system as a whole.[10] For example, the majority might pass legislation that violates the individual rights of a persecuted minority. It might turn to social intimidation to stifle dissent, or, in the worst cases, it might use its numerical superiority to make un-democratic amendments to the constitution, grant dictatorial powers to its chosen leader, or even cancel elections altogether. Regardless of the form(s) of power it wields, this dreaded majority becomes a collective tyrant that attacks the democratic system. Over the past three centuries, majoritarian fears have played a crucial, albeit controversial, role in shaping our modern conception of democracy. This section provides a brief sketch of this complex interplay between democratic hopes and majoritarian fears in an effort to de-exceptionalize similar dynamics in Muslim modernist thought.

In the classical and early modern periods, fears of a tyrannical majority led many Western theorists to reject the possibility and even desirability of democracy. Plato worried that democracy would elevate the unknowing and incapable many over the educated few at the expense of truth itself. He warned of a society in which the teacher is "afraid of his students" and the old become "full of play and pleasantry, imitating the young for fear of appearing disagreeable and authoritarian."[11] Aristotle cautioned that democracy produces a new monarchial majority that would, following its royal predecessors, eschew the rule of law in favor of despotism.[12] In the eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant advanced a similar criticism. He argued that "democracy,

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[10]While such majorities have certainly existed in history, I want to stress that the tyranny of the majority typically functions as a plausible and yet imprecise fear. Fears are, by nature, forward-looking and hence hypothetical. They also involve a degree of numerical imprecision. For democratic theorists, majorities are usually surmised, not counted. For more, see Tamas Nyirkos, *The Tyranny of the Majority: History, Concepts, and Challenges* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 1–6.

[11]Plato, *The Republic*, C.D.C. Reeve, trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2004), 260–61.

[12]Aristotle, *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, Richard McKeon, ed. (New York: Random House, 2001), 1212–13.

in the truest sense of the word, is necessarily a despotism" because it empowers the citizenry to "make decisions about (and indeed against) the single individual without his consent."[13] He endorsed an enlightened, constitutional monarchy instead as the best guarantee of freedom. Distrustful of the uneducated masses, Western theorists from Plato to Kant thus preferred elite guardianships to rule by the people.

Modern democratic theorists inherited these persistent and profound fears about majoritarian tyranny. In the eighteenth century, James Madison argued that a self-interested, or factious, majority constituted a fundamental threat to democracy:

> When a majority is included in a faction, the form of popular government […] enables it to sacrifice to its ruling passion or interests, both the public good and the rights of other citizens. To secure the public good, and private rights, against the danger of such a faction, and at the same time to preserve the spirit and the form of popular government, is then the great object to which our inquiries are directed. Let me add, that it is the great desideratum, by which alone this form of government can be rescued from the opprobrium under which it has so long labored, and be recommended to the esteem and adoption of mankind.[14]

Madison saw the tyranny of the majority as the most difficult dilemma confronting democrats because it had no absolute solutions. Indeed, he understood factionalism as a function of human nature. While it could sprout from religious, political, or especially economic roots, Madison believed that factionalism was so embedded in humans that "where no substantial occasion presents itself, the most frivolous and fanciful distinctions have been sufficient to kindle their unfriendly passions, and excite their most violent conflicts."[15] Since eradicating the causes of factionalism was impossible, Madison and his colleagues labored to limit its negative effects. They saw the work of constraining factions, and especially majority factions, as a life-or-death issue for democracy.[16]

Drawing again from classical theorists, America's founders had deep worries about a related manifestation of the tyranny of the majority: demagogues. As popular politicians, demagogues deploy emotion-laden and polarizing rhetoric to rile up the masses against the elite, and often other minorities, for the sake of their own personal ambitions. Aristotle, who theorized at length about demagogues, warned that, "revolutions in democracies are generally caused by the intemperance of demagogues."[17] He argued that demagogues use their popular support to "override the laws" and "undermine" the authority of democratic institutions.[18] Following Aristotle, America's founders also identified demagogues as the greatest internal threat to democracy. In Federalist Paper No. 1, Alexander Hamilton stressed how history teaches, "that of those men who have overturned the liberties of republics, the

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[13] Immanuel Kant, *Kant: Political Writings*, H. S. Reiss, ed. (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1991), 101.

[14] Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, *The Federalist*, Gideon Edition, George W. Carey and James McClellan, eds. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), 45.

[15] Ibid., 44.

[16] Ibid., 46.

[17] Aristotle, *Basic Works*, 1240.

[18] Ibid., 1213. See also Ryan Skinnell, "Using Democracy against Itself: Demagogic Rhetoric as an Attack on Democratic Institutions," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 49, 3 (2019): 248–63.

greatest number have begun their career by paying an obsequious court to the people … commencing demagogues and ending tyrants."[19] Many of Hamilton's contemporaries, including John Adams, strongly agreed.[20]

To address the intertwined problems of factionalism and demagoguery, Hamilton and Madison supported structural constraints on the majority will. These anti-majoritarian constraints include, fascinatingly enough, representative governance. In Federalist Paper No. 10, Madison admitted "that a pure [direct] democracy, by which I mean a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person, can admit of no cure for the mischiefs of faction."[21] He maintained that the proposed constitution, in contrast, offered two effective treatments. The first was representative rather than direct democracy. Madison argued that representative government would "refine and enlarge the public views, by passing them through the medium of a chosen body of citizens, whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of their country, and whose patriotism and love of justice, will be least likely to sacrifice it to temporary or partial considerations."[22] In other words, he conceptualized elected representatives as wise and patriotic sieves to filter out the self-interested passions of average citizens. It was an elitist check on the personal whims and political immaturity of the masses. Second, Madison insisted that the existence of a larger union would make it more difficult for any one faction to emerge as a majority. He wrote, "extend the sphere, and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests; you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens."[23] Size would thus function as a way to dilute majoritarian power. For Madison, the constitution's vision for a large representative republic greatly reduced the risk of majoritarian tyranny.

Despite these two safeguards, the framers of the U.S. Constitution still feared the potential excesses of the voting masses. They devised three additional structural constraints. The first was the indirect election of senators. The framers tasked state legislators with appointing senators so that they could act as an extra filter to produce the most experienced and respected statesmen. Madison praised the Senate's indirect electoral process and its longer, six-year terms. In Federalist Paper No. 63, he wrote:

> I shall not scruple to add, that such an institution may be sometimes necessary, as a defense to the people against their own temporary errors and delusions…. there are particular moments in public affairs, when the people, stimulated by some irregular passions, or some illicit advantage, or misled by the artful misrepresentations of interested men, may call for measures which they themselves will afterwards be the most ready to lament and condemn. In these critical moments, how salutary will be the interference of some temperate and respectable body of citizens, in order to check the misguided career, and to suspend the blow meditated by the people against themselves, until reason, justice, and truth can regain their authority over the public mind?[24]

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[19]Hamilton, Jay, and Madison, *Federalist*, 3.

[20]Bruce S. Thornton, *Democracy's Dangers and Discontents: The Tyranny of the Majority from the Greeks to Obama* (Stanford: Hoover Institute Press), 55–75.

[21]Hamilton, Jay, and Madison, *Federalist*, 46.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Ibid., 48.

[24]Ibid., 327.

At its origins, the Senate was thus designed as a bulwark against majoritarian "passions" and the "artful manipulations" of demagogues. A second and similar constraint, the Electoral College, guarded against the possibility that an incapable or even demagogic leader might rise to the highest office of the land.[25] The unelected and independent judiciary, endowed with the power of judicial review, constituted the third crucial counterweight to potential excesses of majority rule.[26] At the time, anti-Federalists attacked these constraints as aristocratic and even anti-democratic in nature. The early twentieth century then saw the ratification of the 17th Amendment, which mandated the direct election of senators, and the early twenty-first century has witnessed growing agitation against the Electoral College. Despite their respective controversies, these constraints are undeniably part of the history of democratic theory. Many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century democrats even saw them as integral to the very success of modern democracy.

The mid-twentieth-century rise of fascism ushered in a new wave of democratic fears about tyrannical majorities. German political theorist Karl Loewenstein (1891–1973) located the roots of the fascist threat in the "emotional masses."[27] He argued that European fascists like Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler capitalized on the democratic ideal of popular sovereignty "to arouse, to guide, and to use emotionalism in its crudest and its most refined forms" so that the masses would propel them to power.[28] Mussolini and Hitler had then used their power to dismantle democracy from within. To protect against such anti-democratic mass movements, Loewenstein urged democracies to adopt "militant" tactics. The resulting term "militant democracy," as Jan-Werner Muller explains, "refers to the idea of a democratic regime which is willing to adopt *pre-emptive*, prima facie illiberal measures to prevent those aiming at subverting democracy with democratic means from destroying the democratic regime."[29] The militant democracy toolbox includes: banning symbols and uniforms tied to past authoritarian regimes, curtailing hate speech, and empowering the government to monitor and even dissolve anti-democratic political parties. Since the end of World War II, Germany and other countries have experimented with such constraints. Without a doubt, militant democracy remains a controversial concept. Legal and political scholars debate a number of key questions. Does the threat of a tyrannical majority emerge from too much democracy or too little? Where should democracies draw the line? Who can be trusted to draw that line? Even militant democracy's most vocal proponents, like András Sajó (b. 1949), admit that these anti-majoritarian constraints can be used to stifle legitimate political dissent.[30] Despite these critiques, militant democracy still falls securely within the scope of democratic theorizing.[31]

While Western theorists have often focused their fears on the political tyranny of the majority, two prominent nineteenth-century theorists raised alarms about the

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[25]Ibid., 351–55.

[26]Nyirkos, *Tyranny*, 70–72, 83.

[27]Karl Loewenstein, "Militant Democracy and Fundamental Rights I," *American Political Science Review* 31, 3 (1937): 417–32, 423.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Jan-Werner Muller, "Militant Democracy," in Michel Rosenfeld and András Sajó, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Constitutional Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1253.

[30]András Sajó, "Militant Democracy and Emotional Politics," *Constellations* 19, 4 (2012): 562, 570–71.

[31]Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 163–92.

social tyranny of the majority as well. In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville argued that Americans so valorized the principle of majority rule that it produced a culture of conformity:

> Today, the most absolute sovereigns of Europe cannot prevent certain ideas hostile to their authority from circulating silently within their States and even within their courts. It is not the same in America; as long as the majority is uncertain, people speak; but as soon as the majority has irrevocably decided, everyone is silent, and friends as well as enemies then seem to climb on board together. The reason for this is simple. There is no monarch so absolute that he can gather in his hands all of society's forces and vanquish opposition in the way that a majority vested with the right to make and execute laws can at will, vested with the right and the force. A king, moreover, has only a physical power that acts on deeds and cannot reach wills; but the majority is vested with a strength simultaneously physical and moral, which acts on the will as well as on actions and which at the same time prevents the deed and the desire to do it. I know of no country where, in general, there reigns less independence of mind and true freedom of discussion than in America.[32]

According to Tocqueville, social tyranny represents democracy's dark underbelly. In America, the democratic majority was so powerful because it had no serious moral counterweight, whether it be a respected monarch or an established aristocracy. This absolute power enabled majority opinion to seep into every corner of American society and compel conformity. He characterized the majority as "omnipotent" and potentially limitless in its ability to shun, intimidate, and control.[33] John Stuart Mill shared Tocqueville's bleak assessment of democratic culture. Mill argued that social tyranny posed a threat not only to individual free expression but to the vitality of civilization itself and therefore proposed a set of principles to protect innovative individuals from the pressures to conform. He also worked to extend their ranks by educating the masses. Mill hoped that, because education cultivates creativity and individuality, it would reduce the likelihood that the masses would devolve into majoritarian tyranny.[34] I will elaborate on this concept of social tyranny in the Indonesian section below.

Clearly, the tyranny of the majority has played an integral role in Western democratic theory. Majoritarian fears compelled Western theorists to develop representative forms of governance, checks and balances, and constitutional measures to defend democracy from fascist threats. These fears also shaped democratic theories concerning citizenship education and the proper limits (or lack thereof) of free expression. Although this European and American history is the best known, there is little reason to believe that majoritarian fears are unique to the Western political tradition. On the contrary, I argue that the tyranny of the majority also has deep roots among Muslim modernists. There are, of course, important differences between, and among, Western and Muslim thinkers. Muslim modernists ground their arguments in Islamic foundational texts and

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[32]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Eduardo Nolla, ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010), vol. 1, 417.
[33]Ibid., 428.
[34]John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Elizabeth Rapaport, ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1978).

hence articulate both their democratic hopes and their majoritarian fears in the language of the Islamic discursive tradition. They occupy a different conceptual and contextual landscape. Nevertheless, the similarities between Western and Muslim thinkers remain hidden just below the surface. Excavating these parallels simply requires some digging.

The Case of Fazlur Rahman

In October 1958, General Ayub Khan supported President Iskander Mirza's decision to abrogate the Pakistani constitution and, in exchange, received a promotion to Chief Marshal Law Administrator. Weeks later, Khan forced Mirza into exile and claimed the reigns of the state for himself. It was Pakistan's first military coup. During his eleven years in power, Khan embarked on an ambitious campaign to remake Pakistani politics and society from the ground up. He moved first to dismantle the country's nascent parliamentary democracy. Deriding parties as sources for political instability and corruption, he detained political leaders, froze party bank accounts, and temporarily banned party activities altogether. Khan next imposed a new political system called "Basic Democracy" on the country, under which Pakistani citizens elected local councils that, in turn, voted for the president and assembly members. This indirect electoral system bypassed national political parties and centralized power in the hands of the president and his bureaucracy. Khan also set his sights on wide-scale economic and social reform. He oversaw a period of substantial but unequal economic development and worked to modernize Pakistani society through systematic Islamic and educational reforms. Overall, Khan held some democratic sentiments, but his government was, at its core, a top-down modernizing military regime.[35]

During the Ayub Khan era, Fazlur Rahman both articulated a robust theory for Islamic democracy and offered practical justifications for military authoritarian rule. Intellectually, he devoted substantial energy to unearthing what he saw as Islam's egalitarian and democratic origins. He then used his historical research to construct a vision for Islam's democratic future. Practically, Rahman took proactive steps to strengthen Ayub Khan's regime. In 1961, he requested a year's unpaid leave from McGill University and moved to Karachi to serve as a visiting scholar at Khan's Institute of Islamic Research. Shortly after his arrival, Rahman grew frustrated with what he saw as the Institute's inactivity. He approached Khan directly about the situation and eventually won the president's trust along with an appointment as the Institute's new director.[36] During his six years (1962–1968) as director, Rahman served as a close advisor and even "confidant" to Khan.[37] He helped formulate Khan's policies on Islamic matters, including banking interest (*riba*), family law, and Islamic

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[35]For more on Ayub Khan and especially Basic Democracy, see Mohammad Ayub Khan, *Friends not Masters: A Political Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 186–241; Kunal Mukherjee, "Ayub Khan's Basic Democracy and Political Continuity in Contemporary Pakistan," *India Quarterly* 72, 3 (2016): 268–77; Saadia Toor, *The State of Islam: Culture and Cold War Politics in Pakistan* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 80–110; and Lawrence Ziring, *The Ayub Khan Era: Politics in Pakistan, 1958–1969* (Karachi: Paramount Publishing Enterprise, 2009).

[36]Megan Brankley Abbas, "Between Western Academia and Pakistan: Fazlur Rahman and the Fight for Fusionism," *Modern Asian Studies* 51, 3 (2017): 736–68, 748–49.

[37]Toor, *State of Islam*, 94.

education. He used the Institute's English-language journal, *Islamic Studies*, to draft a comprehensive Islamic ideology for the regime.[38] Although these two threads seem to be in tension, Rahman managed to knot them together into a complex but coherent project. Specifically, I argue that Rahman was committed to an ideal democratic vision but was also plagued by persistent fears of demagogues and tyrannical masses. These fears led him to conclude that a temporary strongman like Khan was necessary to reform the masses and hence give Pakistan a fighting chance to achieve his Islamic democratic ideal.

Democratic Hopes

In the 1960s, Rahman argued that any Islamic state must be "completely democratic."[39] He explained that "the Qur'an confirmed this democratic institution [of assemblies] and asked the Muslims to carry on and decide their affairs by free participation, equal collaboration, and mutual consultation."[40] Drawing on this interpretation of Islamic origins, Rahman attacked Abul Ala Mawdudi's argument that the sovereignty of God trumped the sovereignty of the people and hence rendered democracy, at its essence, un-Islamic. In September 1967, he wrote:

> This talk implies […] that God is politically Sovereign. Any student of political history knows that the term "sovereign" as a political term is of a relatively recent coinage and denotes that definite and defined factor (or factors) in a society to which rightfully belongs *coercive force* in order to obtain obedience to its will. It is absolutely obvious that God is not sovereign in this sense and that only people can be and are sovereign, since only to them belongs ultimate coercive force, i.e. only their 'Word is law' in the politically ultimate sense. It is, of course, patently true that the Qur'an often makes statements to the effect that God is the most Supreme Judge and that His alone is the power over the heavens and the earth. But it is equally true that this has no reference to political sovereignty whatever.[41]

In other words, Rahman drew a sharp distinction between metaphysical and political sovereignty. Whereas metaphysical sovereignty clearly denotes that God is the creator of the universe and the ultimate judge of human behavior, political sovereignty is an entirely human attribute. Rahman pointed to the Qur'an itself as evidence for this distinction, noting that many verses implore Muslims to "decide matters in accordance with justice and equity" and thus delegate decision-making powers to human beings.[42] He concluded that "the Muslim people themselves are the Sovereign and the law-maker."[43] In this manner, Rahman simultaneously challenged

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[38]Zaman, *Islam in Pakistan*, 71.

[39]Rahman, "Implementation," 209.

[40]Fazlur Rahman, "Some Reflections on the Reconstruction of Muslim Society in Pakistan," *Islamic Studies* 6, 2 (1967): 103–20, 110.

[41]Rahman, "Implementation," 208–9.

[42]Ibid., 209.

[43]Ibid.

Mawdudi's politicization of God's sovereignty and endorsed the people's sovereignty as an Islamic value.

Rahman also derived a decidedly democratic ethos from the Qur'an.[44] As a committed modernist, he insisted that the Qur'an "is not a legal document" and "the actual legislation of the Qur'an cannot have been meant to be literally eternal."[45] The Qur'an was instead, for Rahman, the source of universal principles, and he located the principle of human equality at its very heart. He used the evocative phrase "One God—One Humanity" to capture the Qur'anic message that monotheism was never merely theological in nature but rather holds immense social and ethical significance.[46] God's oneness conveys that humans share a common origin and destination; it obliterates any hierarchies or other arbitrary distinctions based on tribe, race, and nationality. Rahman summarized: "In effect, the entire Islamic movement and the teachings of the Qur'an can be seen as directed towards the creation of a meaningful and positive equality among human beings."[47] He called this movement the Islamic "impulse for social justice."[48] Rahman's democratic ethos also included the principle of freedom. He stressed that the Qur'an eliminated all intermediaries between believers and God and therefore freed Muslims from unthinking obedience to both religious scholars and political leaders. He explained: "There are few more insistent themes in the Qur'an than that every man must think for himself, must use his reason, and must come to his own decision."[49] Rahman therefore called Islam a "liberating force" and "the midwife for the birth of a free humanity."[50] The Qur'anic values of equality and freedom, according to him, empowered and even obligated Muslims to participate in their own democratic governance.

Rahman translated these democratic principles into a tangible blueprint for Islamic democracy in 1960s Pakistan. He used the classical Islamic concepts of *ijtihad* (returning directly to the Qur'an and Sunnah to derive fresh reason-based interpretations), *shura* (mutual consultation), and *ijma* (consensus) to formulate his proposal. *Ijtihad* would be the proper starting point for democratic governance. Rahman explained that an Islamic democracy should empower its citizens to practice *ijtihad* in order "to think out new solutions to problems on the basis of Islamic principles" and must then ensure that their solutions "naturally be put at the disposal of the Community at large" for discussion, debate, and revision.[51] Solutions that gain public support should serve as the basis for new legislation. Importantly, Rahman insisted that practicing *ijtihad* was the right of *all* Muslims:

> Ijtihad may be performed by any competent person or persons, whether their vocation is "religious" or not, since ijtihad, as has been defined above, is not the

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[44]Rahman's democratic ethos closely resembles that of Robert Dahl, who identifies human equality and personal autonomy as the two presuppositional justifications for democracy. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*, 83–105.

[45]Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 37, 39.

[46]Ibid., 12.

[47]Rahman, "Reflections,"103.

[48]Ibid., 105.

[49]Ibid., 108.

[50]Ibid.

[51]Rahman, "Implementation," 216.

prerogative of any class…. Ijtihad is really an attempt at thinking and nobody ever either "gave" any one the right to think or "confiscated" this right from him. Man is a thinking machine, and if he is properly fed and educated, he will inevitably think. The ʿulama, however, represent ijtihad as something highly technical, which is patently false….[52]

Rahman conceded that educated Muslims, whether religious scholars or otherwise, would play especially important roles in law-making, but he maintained that experts should never bar other Muslims from exercising their rights to interpret the Qur'an and Sunnah and to propose new solutions for societal problems. This open approach to *ijtihad* would, in Rahman's vision, honor the Qur'anic principles of equality and freedom and foster a vibrant public culture in modernizing Muslim societies.

Rahman next sought to institutionalize this *ijtihad* culture in the form of an elected legislative assembly. The legislative assembly would embody the concept of *shura*, and, as Rahman explained, "In shura, people consult one another and discuss the issues constructively with a mutual purpose."[53] Once legislators had sufficient time to discuss and amend proposed laws, they would vote and arrive at a formal *ijma* on the matter. This *ijma*, while binding on the entire community, would not necessarily be permanent. Rahman elaborated: "One ijma can be replaced by another, more adequate ijma, and one law amended or repealed by another. The doctrine held by many of our religious doctors that the ijma of bygone times cannot be repealed or replaced is a merest dogma without any foundation. Neither the Qur'an nor the Sunnah has anything at all to this effect. Indeed, the 'closing of the door of ijtihad' and the irreparability of earlier *ijma* were the twin doctrines whereby Islamic progress committed suicide."[54] Rahman thus ensured the right of a Muslim majority to revisit earlier Islamic laws if social circumstances changed. Drawing on Qur'anic principles and Islamic legal concepts, Rahman laid strong conceptual and institutional foundations for a modern Islamic democracy.

Majoritarian Fears

Despite developing this multi-layered democratic vision, Rahman also held some decidedly less democratic and even authoritarian views in the 1960s. He expressed a preference for "a strong man at the helm" and openly praised Khan's military coup as "a revolution of a fundamental type in the social, political, and economic life-pattern of Pakistan."[55] He endorsed many features of Khan's Basic Democracy system, including its top-down programs for religious, economic, and social reform.[56] He rejected political parties as un-Islamic in nature and even offered Qur'anic justifications for press censorship.[57] I argue that these countercurrents in Rahman's otherwise democratic philosophy flow from his fears of a tyrannical majority.

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[52]Ibid., 217.

[53]Ibid., 209.

[54]Ibid., 218.

[55]Fazlur Rahman, review of *Friends not Masters: A Political Autobiography*, by Ayub Khan, *Islamic Studies* 6, 2 (1967): 197–99.

[56]Rahman, "Reflections," 115–19.

[57]Zaman, *Islam in Pakistan*, 71.

Over the course of the 1960s, Rahman harbored deep concerns about the condition and capabilities of the Pakistani masses. He repeatedly lamented their lack of education, in particular, as an impediment to building his ideal Islamic democracy. For example, he insisted that "our first and foremost problem is that our masses are by and large illiterate and ignorant…. It may almost be said that an uneducated man can hardly be a proper Muslim because he cannot really know what is demanded of him in the world today."[58] He seemed to doubt whether uneducated Muslims could practice *ijtihad*, *shura*, and *ijma* like he envisioned. Even worse, Rahman argued, because the Pakistani masses were so uneducated, they became easy prey for demagogues. In 1967, he wrote:

> There is … no doubt that the Islamic State obtains its warrant from the people. What is necessary is to ascertain what the people's *real* wants and purposes are. This procedure can be a tricky business even in developed societies because of the working of pressure groups; but, in the case of developing societies where huge masses are illiterate and only a tiny minority enjoys the benefits of education, it becomes extremely difficult to ascertain what the real will of the people is through normal electoral procedures as followed in Western democracies. This is because the vested interests of various educated classes almost invariably intervene and tend to conceal the mind of the dumb masses from being correctly expressed.[59]

In other words, Rahman maintained that lack of education led to false consciousness among the Pakistani masses. Rather than identifying and articulating their own desires, the majority of peasants, laborers, and other poor Pakistanis fell for the propaganda and other manipulative practices of self-serving elites. Having captured mass support, these unscrupulous leaders could then pursue their own, often nefarious, purposes in the name of the people. Ignorance, according to Rahman, begets demagoguery.

Rahman was most concerned about what he saw as the demagogic power of the Pakistani 'ulama. He accused the 'ulama of "spiritual exploitation" and even "tyranny" on the grounds that they, despite clear Qur'anic injunctions against human hierarchies, "claim an exclusive prerogative of possessing the religious truth."[60] The 'ulama then used their specious claims to represent "orthodox" Islam to mobilize the masses and to silence legitimate Muslim dissent. In his book *Islam* (1968), Rahman blamed the medieval Sunni orthodoxy for its "narrowness and rigidity…, which seemed to stifle the very spirit of enquiry and with it all growth of positive knowledge."[61] He saw similar dynamics plaguing 1960s Pakistan. For example, he seethed with frustration over how conservative Muslims wielded their popular religious authority to defeat much-needed economic and social reforms that would benefit the majority of poor Muslims. The 'ulama simply used slogans about "defending Islam" to turn the gullible masses against such progressive measures. To make matters worse, Pakistani leaders also kowtowed to the 'ulama because they

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[58]Fazlur Rahman, "The Qur'anic Solution of Pakistan's Educational Problems," *Islamic Studies* 6, 4 (1967): 315–26, 323.

[59]Rahman, "Implementation," 205.

[60]Rahman, "Reflections," 108.

[61]Rahman, *Islam*, 5.

feared that "the masses are behind the mullahs."[62] Rahman complained, "the force of conservative Islam—which is partly a fact and partly becomes inflated by sheer political maneuvering and exploitation—naturally functions as a powerful inhibition" to social change.[63] Rahman experienced the demagogic power of the 'ulama firsthand in his role as director of the Islamic Research Institute. His reformist proposals attracted repeated criticisms from prominent religious scholars. After traditionalist firebrands labeled him an "Orientalist" and a "denier of the Qur'an" in 1968, protestors took to the streets of Lahore to denounce his work and even offered a price for his head. The mass outcry eventually forced Rahman to resign his post and seek exile in the United States.[64] The dangers of demagoguery and majoritarian tyranny were real.

Rahman worried about two other, less entrenched but still destructive demagogic forces in Pakistani politics: Mawdudi's Jamaat-i Islami and national political parties. He was exceedingly skeptical that Mawdudi would ever agree to participate in an Islamic democracy. In addition to his anti-democratic writings, the Jamaat founder often used incendiary rhetoric against religious minorities and Muslim modernists alike to fuel mass protests and even occasional violence in post-independence Pakistan. Rahman thus suggested that, like a true demagogue, Mawdudi only paid lip service to democracy when it served his personal ambitions, like ending Ayub Khan's government, but would quickly revert to his "intolerant" and anti-democratic roots once in power.[65] He was a tyrant in waiting. Rahman also accused Pakistan's other political parties of engaging in demagoguery. He maintained that political parties failed to function as vehicles for popular sovereignty and rather served as representatives of "the vested interests of various educated classes."[66] He likewise lamented that politicians too often huddled in capital cities to strategize about how to best the rival party and defeat their opponents; it was politics "for the sake of opposition."[67] Rahman condemned this oppositional party structure on the grounds that it enabled and perhaps even encouraged politicians to engage in endless gamesmanship and to shirk their responsibility to the common good. Later in his career, Rahman issued even more explicit warnings about political parties and the "perils of democratic demagoguery."[68]

Rahman proposed several solutions for Pakistan's problems with demagoguery and tyrannical masses. In the long term, he argued that education would serve as the best defense against any manipulation of the majority will. He reasoned that education would help the masses to exercise their own God-given reason, to see through dangerous propaganda, and to articulate their true interests. It would

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[62]Fazlur Rahman, "Islamic Modernism: Its Scope, Method, and Alternatives," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 1, 4 (1970): 317–33, 321 n2.

[63]Fazlur Rahman, "Islam and Social Justice," *Pakistan Forum* 1, 1 (1970): 4–5, 9, quote from p. 4.

[64]Abbas, "Between Western Academia and Pakistan," 748–59; Zaman, *Islam in Pakistan*, 72–74.

[65]Fazlur Rahman, "Currents of Religious Thought in Pakistan," *Islamic Studies* 7, 1 (1968): 1–7, 5. For an overview of Mawdudi's activities during the Ayub Khan years, see Seyed Vali Reza Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jamaat-i Islami of Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 147–69.

[66]Rahman, "Implementation," 206.

[67]Ibid.

[68]Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 44; Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 140.

therefore reduce the likelihood that the majority would ever rally behind charismatic religious authorities or factious politicians. Accordingly, Rahman campaigned for nation-wide education reform throughout the 1960s and even described it as "the fundamental duty" of any Islamic state.[69] For him, protecting the people's sovereignty necessitated reforming the people. On this point, Rahman resembled John Stuart Mill more than Plato, Aristotle, or the American founders because, like Mill, he adopted the optimistic, albeit elitist, view that the masses could be perfected.

Yet, in the meantime, Rahman also supported a series of anti-majoritarian structural constraints to prevent demaguery and the tyranny of the majority in Pakistan. First, he argued that the country required "a strong leader with vision, capability, and power of decision"—like Ayub Khan—if Islamic democracy were to thrive.[70] While insisting that such a leader should "be elected by the people and command their general confidence," Rahman endorsed Khan's controversial use of indirect elections.[71]

> Elections may be direct or indirect, depending on prevailing conditions. Since a developing country is likely be faced with delicate and subtle capital issues arising out of a socio-economic development programme, the masses are in a great danger of being exploited by sectional interest and, in fact, it is the duty of the Government to safeguard the larger interests of the public and not to succumb to the protestations of the educated minority groups. Once people in general become enlightened with the spread of education and with the development of industry, direct elections may well be introduced at that stage.[72]

Put another way, Rahman worried that direct elections would enable factious and even demagogic elites to take advantage of Pakistan's uneducated masses at the expense of the common good. He hoped that indirect elections would act to filter self-interest and irrational passions out of the political system. His argument thus closely resembles those that America's founders used to justify indirect elections for both senators and the president.

Rahman's similarities with America's founders did not end there. While he envisioned Pakistan's "strong leader" as representative of and beholden to the people, he also explained that a true Islamic state "requires a strong central authority, capable of taking decisions and enforcing them in the interests of the progress of the country even if they may be temporarily unpopular."[73] In other words, he called for a popularly elected executive who would, somewhat paradoxically, have the power to override popular opinion. Madison shared similarly paradoxical views about the Senate. He hoped that because senators were indirectly elected and served longer terms, they would act as checks on the "temporary errors and delusions" of the people.[74] In another article from the period, Rahman used the term "authoritarian democracy" to describe this paternalistic conception of popular sovereignty. He explained that Muslim governments in particular often had to contend with "the moral underdevelopment

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[69]Rahman, "Qur'anic Solution," 323.
[70]Rahman, "Implementation," 205.
[71]Ibid.
[72]Ibid., 207–8.
[73]Ibid., 205.
[74]Hamilton, Jay, and Madison, *Federalist*, 327.

of the people for whom and in whose name development programs are undertaken without any role being taken by them."[75] In light of this situation, a government might need to challenge popular opinion in order to implement pressing social reforms. He cited occasional American decisions to deploy troops to enforce civil rights laws as an example and called on Muslim leaders to use their power to effect bold reforms rather than "let slip [t]his most valuable opportunity in the name of the unity and solidarity of the society."[76] According to Rahman, this form of "authoritarian democracy" was sometimes necessary to overcome temporary social roadblocks and pave the way for a democratic future. He envisioned it as a short-term, structural solution to majoritarian tyranny, calling it "a regime through which one hopes real democracy will develop."[77]

Rahman made a second controversial structural proposal to reign in elitist factions and reduce their corrosive influence over the majority will: eliminate political parties. While this proposal seems at first glance to be thoroughly anti-democratic, Rahman defended it as the lesser of two evils:

> In our view, the Islamic concept of *Shura-Ijma* is not quite compatible with a multi-party system as it is practiced in modern democracies. Whereas Islam allows freedom of expression and constructive criticism in the fullest possible sense—and indeed, casts it as a religious duty—it appears to us to be averse to the creation of parties for the sake of opposition. It is true that [a] one-party system has certain pitfalls, but the multi-party system seems to be beset with greater pitfalls, particularly in a developing society, since it tends to weaken responsible thought and action among many politicians. But in a state where only one party is allowed, that single party must be a dynamic party fully representing the masses.[78]

Rahman reasoned that multi-party systems foster factionalism at best and demagoguery at worst. They thus leave the masses bereft of genuine representation. As an alternative, Rahman suggested that a single, larger party would compel politicians to abandon their narrow self-interests and strive instead to represent the collective interests of Pakistani society. In many ways, Rahman applied Madison and Hamilton's logic about a larger union to political parties. A single, larger party, like a single, larger union, encourages more moderate and responsible representatives and dilutes the potential for a tyrannical majority.

Third, Rahman argued that an Islamic democracy might occasionally resort to censorship to protect itself and the well-being of vulnerable minorities. Such recourse to censorship initially appears to contradict Rahman's fierce commitment to free expression, and yet he tied the two principles together. He explained: "The Shura institution allows full scope for criticism, provided it is purposeful and constructive.... No voice is to be stilled and no expression of opinion is to be suppressed."[79] He hence welcomed a diverse range of policy proposals and criticisms; indeed, his model for open *ijtihad* and *ijma* depended on freedom of expression. However, Rahman drew the line at destructive or inciteful speech, writing: "What is not to be tolerated is an attitude of

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[75]Rahman, "Islamic Modernism," 321.

[76]Ibid., 321–22.

[77]For some of these insights, Rahman drew on Gunner Myrdal's *Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations*, vol. 3 (New York: Penguin Press, 1968). Rahman, "Islamic Modernism," 321.

[78]Rahman, "Implementation," 206.

[79]Ibid., 210.

subversion or disaffection or inviting people to unconstitutional means to overthrow a government or instilling in them a spirit of hopelessness and despair."[80] With these words, Rahman permitted the state to censor voices that attack the very foundations of Islamic democracy. He did not name names, but he would have likely included Mawdudi's arguments against democracy and even traditionalist attempts to limit participation in *ijtihad* and *ijma* as legitimate targets for censorship since they undermined "the basic mutual confidence" of Islamic democracy.[81] He also included incendiary sectarianism as an appropriate target for state sanction because it threatened law and order as well as the safety of minorities.[82] In this sense, Rahman reasoned that protecting free expression entailed censoring certain arguments against free expression. It is an argument that, while breaking with Mill, closely resembles those advanced by twentieth- and twenty-first-century militant democrats.

These structural constraints raise important questions about the sincerity of Rahman's democratic commitments. Was he, like Ayub Khan, merely paying lip service to democracy? Did he compromise his democratic principles in exchange for access to political power? A skeptic might suggest that Rahman's anti-majoritarian constraints constitute yet another case of the classic authoritarian bait-and-switch: ask citizens to tolerate non-democratic exceptions in the present for the sake of some chimeric democratic norm in the future. While likely apt for Ayub Khan, this charge makes far less sense for Rahman. He devoted years to elaborating a detailed vision for Islamic democracy and continued that work well after the collapse of Khan's regime. Accordingly, his scholarship should not be read as a mere rhetorical ruse to strengthen Khan's legitimacy. Another skeptic might cast Rahman's gradualism as a convenient compromise to ensure access to power rather than as a principled intellectual stance. This accusation of crass opportunism rings hollow for two reasons. First, Rahman argued that the Qur'an itself adopted a gradualist approach to realizing social justice, thereby rendering gradualism an Islamic principle rather than a profane political tactic.[83] Second, he repeatedly refused to moderate his intellectual views for the sake of career advancement. When his modernist ideas sparked controversy, he defended them rather than backing down, even in the face of mass protests and eventual exile. Expedient compromise was patently not part of Rahman's professional repertoire. As a result, I argue that Rahman's mixed record in the 1960s represents a *genuine* attempt to confront the *real* dilemmas posed by the tyranny of the majority. His proposals to prevent majoritarian tyranny were, and should be, considered controversial, but are they really so different from the constraints that Western democratic theorists have devised?

The Case of Indonesia's Young Modernists

Suharto's New Order regime was born during a period of crisis and mass political violence. In late September 1965, several disaffected army units rose up in rebellion against their superiors. They kidnapped and killed six generals and briefly occupied central Jakarta. The Indonesian Army, however, moved swiftly to crush the revolt.

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[80]Ibid.

[81]Ibid. Rahman once advised Khan that Mawdudi's work was "a direct attack on his government," which led to the Jamaat leader's arrest. Nasr, *Vanguard*, 158–59.

[82]Ibid., 215.

[83]Rahman, *Islam*, 38–39.

Within days, General Suharto blamed the killings on the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia / PKI) and orchestrated a national campaign to annihilate the Indonesian left. Over the course of the next six months, the army and its civilian allies executed between five hundred thousand and a million Indonesians and imprisoned many thousands more without trial.[84] Suharto used the turmoil to consolidate power and officially seized control of the state from his leftist predecessor Sukarno on 11 March 1966. For the next thirty years, the New Order staked its legitimacy on the twin pillars of rabid anti-communism and rapid national development. Suharto opened the country to Western investment and promulgated a series of Five-Year Development Plans. He also restructured Indonesian politics. Like Ayub Khan, Suharto viewed political parties as hotbeds of instability and sidelined them in favor of his own supposedly non-ideological system of "functional groups" (Golongan Karya / Golkar). Suharto did allow elections, but the army was so powerful and Golkar possessed so many structural advantages that voting was for little more than show. Undoubtedly, the New Order was a repressive, military authoritarian state.

The rise of the New Order created a dilemma for young Muslim activists in Indonesia. On the one hand, they could follow their modernist elders into the opposition. Senior modernists, many of whom had ties to the banned Islamic party Masyumi, refused to countenance Suharto's Western-style developmentalist ideology and vowed instead to continue to wage the struggle for a more Islamic Indonesia. These former Masyumi leaders represented the modernist status quo. Consequently, remaining loyal to their Masyumi mentors would not rock any intra-Muslim boats, but young modernists feared that it might strand them in the political and intellectual wilderness of a rapidly changing Indonesia. On the other hand, young modernists could choose to break from the Masyumi-inspired status quo and adopt a more independent approach to Indonesian politics. Muslim student activists spent several years in the late 1960s wrestling over their options. Then, in the early 1970s, a cohort of young modernists launched a national campaign for Islamic renewal (*pembaharuan*). The leaders of the movement included the Jakarta-based scholar-activist Nurcholish Madjid (1939–2005) and his close Yogyakarta-based colleagues, Djohan Effendi (1939–2017) and Ahmad Wahib (1942–1973).[85] The young modernists, also known as neo-modernists or liberal Muslims, rejected Masyumi's old demands for an Islamic state and instead embraced both New Order developmentalism and the multi-religious nationalist ideology of Pancasila. Some accepted posts in the New Order religious bureaucracy, and Effendi even became a speechwriter for Suharto.

Like Rahman, the young modernists had a complex relationship with democracy.[86] They advocated for democratic principles in their writings and, in Madjid and Effendi's cases, played significant roles in Indonesia's transition to

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[84]For an authoritative history of these anti-Communist massacres, see Geoffrey Robinson, *The Killing Season: A History of the Indonesian Massacres, 1965–66* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

[85]Tragically, Wahib died in a traffic accident at the age of thirty. His diary, which Effendi edited and helped to publish, provides an invaluable contemporary window into the young modernist movement. For more on its importance, see Barton, "Neo-Modernism," 10–11.

[86]In the early 1980s, Madjid earned his doctorate under Rahman's supervision at the University of Chicago. Although Madjid would later draw inspiration from Rahman, he had not yet met him nor likely read his works during the period under examination. For more on their relationship, see Abbas, *Whose Islam?*, 122–54; Barton, "Neo-Modernism," 5–6, 16; and Carool Kersten, *Cosmopolitans and Heretics: New Muslim Intellectuals and the Study of Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 69–84, 95–100.

democracy in the late 1990s. Yet, they were also thoroughly entangled with Suharto's authoritarian regime. These similarities with Rahman are of prime importance, but I also want to pause briefly to acknowledge some subtle differences between the two cases. The three Indonesians were, to state the obvious, much younger than Rahman. Their junior status meant that they only had distant relationships with Suharto and top regime officials in the 1970s. They were also already living in Indonesia at the time of the coup and therefore had less choice about whether, though not how, to navigate the political landscape. Most importantly, the young modernists neither openly praised Suharto in print nor endorsed the New Order as an ideal Islamic state as Rahman had done for Ayub Khan. They focused instead on dethroning their Masyumi elders from their positions of community leadership and criticizing what they saw as the country's dominant Islamic culture. These activities constitute a less direct yet still significant form of authoritarian collaboration because they weakened Islamic opposition to the New Order and provided religious justifications for Muslims to cooperate with the regime. I argue that this willingness to collaborate ran deeper than mere political convenience for the young modernists. Specifically, Madjid, Effendi, and Wahib were, like Tocqueville and Mill, so concerned with protecting freedom of expression that they saw Masyumi's social tyranny as a more pressing problem than Suharto's political tyranny. This fear of social tyranny led the young modernists to the paradoxical conclusion that Suharto could better protect Muslim free thought, at least in the short term, than his grassroots Islamic opposition.

Democratic Hopes

During the New Order's first decade, the young modernists often spoke and wrote in favor of democracy. They certainly exercised a prudent caution about overly criticizing Suharto's government, but they voiced support for democratization, nevertheless. As early as 1968, Madjid suggested that the New Order lacked democratic legitimacy. He even posed a series of pointed rhetorical questions: "Was it not democracy that served as our weapon for destroying Sukarno and the Old Order? Is democracy not […] a form of representative government? Is a representative government not a government by majority?"[87] While stopping short of denouncing the New Order as utterly undemocratic, he did call for reforms. Madjid continued to push publicly for democratization in the wake of the anti-government Malari protests of 1974. He argued that, while there is no universal ideal form of democracy, every country must devise a democratic system that works for its culture and people. He suggested that the New Order had taken concrete steps towards democratization, but necessary reforms remained, including "giving greater freedom to official political institutions, especially the People's Representative Council (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat / DPR) and political parties."[88] Madjid also worked to strengthen Indonesia's weak opposition parties. In 1977, he campaigned for the Muslim community's United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan / PPP). Although the election was heavily skewed in

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[87]Nurcholish Madjid, *Karya Lengkap Nurcholish Madjid: Keislaman, Keindoensiaan, dan Kemodernan*, Budhy Munawar Rachman, ed. (Jakarta: Nurcholish Madjid Society, 2019), 273.
[88]Ibid., 1341.

Golkar's favor, the PPP still managed to win 30 percent of the vote.[89] Wahib expressed even more explicit support for democracy in his personal diary. He identified democracy and socialism as core commitments driving many young modernists.[90] Even in the authoritarian 1970s, the young modernists worked for a democratic future in Indonesia.

Although they ventured occasional democratic critiques of the New Order, the young modernists poured most of their intellectual energy into locating democratic principles in the Islamic discursive tradition. Madjid turned to the concept of *khalifa* to justify the sovereignty of the people. Citing the Qur'an, he argued that humans have a special mandate from God. Whereas the natural world, animals, and even angels have no free will, humans accepted God's offer to bear this responsibility. The mandate empowers humans to use their reason to navigate the world and rewards them for good decisions but also punishes them for poor ones.[91] Madjid wrote, "Because of this human superiority, we hold a noble status as God's '*khalifa* on Earth.' *Khalifa* means successor. Therefore, humans are God's successor on Earth, meaning that worldly affairs are entrusted to humanity. Indeed, to manage the world, God gives guidance but only in broad strokes. God gives neither detailed instructions nor detailed information about this world. However, God provides a tool that enables humans to understand and find solutions for worldly problems: reason or intellect."[92] According to Madjid, God delegated His sovereignty to humans who must think and reason in order to solve various worldly problems. He suggested that God's laws are "limitless" like the universe itself, and hence, rather than locating them in any fixed texts, humans must strive to discover and understand God's laws for themselves.[93] Young modernists coupled this argument with frequent appeals for collective decision-making and majority representation.

Like Rahman, the young modernists also derived a broader democratic ethos from the Qur'an and Sunnah. In the early 1970s, they wrote extensively about equality and social justice as Islamic imperatives. Madjid often lamented that Indonesians so focused on the mechanics of performing ablutions or other rituals that they seemed to forget about the Qur'an's egalitarian message. He implored his fellow Muslims to remember "how often the Qur'an mentions that wealth is a loan from God that is extended to its recipients to be used for their fellow human beings or the common good."[94] For Madjid, human equality was just as important as religious rituals. The young modernists also championed freedom of expression as a foundational Islamic principle. Wahib's diary contains numerous entries about the relationship between faith and rationality, like this one from October 1969:

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[89]Greg Barton, "Indonesia's Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahib as Intellectual Ulama: The Meeting of Islamic Traditionalism and Modernism in Neo-Modernist Thought," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8, 3 (1997): 323–50, 333.

[90]Ahmad Wahib, *Pergolakan Pemikiran Islam: Catatan Harian Ahmad Wahib*, Djohan Effendi and Ismed Natsir, eds., digital ed. (Jakarta: Democracy Project, 2012), 73–89, 151.

[91]Madjid, *Karya Lengkap*, 304. For more on Madjid's interpretation of *khalifa*, see Carool Kersten, "Khilafa as the Viceregency of Humankind: Religion and State in the Thought of Nurcholish Madjid," in Madawi al-Rasheed, Carool Kersten, and Marat Shterin, eds., *Demystifying the Caliphate: Historical Memory and Contemporary Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 165–84.

[92]Ibid., 305–6.

[93]Ibid., 326–27.

[94]Ibid., 332–33.

Indeed, how can a person be ordered to believe voluntarily that God exists if one is not permitted to consider the possibility that God does not exist? How can we be certain that all Islamic teachings are true if the possibility that there are weaknesses in Islamic teachings never crossed our minds? Furthermore, if one has a desire to consider these possibilities, then it is declared forbidden and wrong…. I believe that God does not appreciate those with such a mean attitude … and that God smiles on all who question the truth and falsehood of [teachings].[95]

Wahib thus stressed the individual spiritual benefits of free thought. Similarly, Madjid identified free speech as the "most valuable … personal freedom" and highlighted its collective benefits by citing the hadith that "differences of opinion within the Muslim community are a blessing."[96] Although thousands of miles away and junior to Rahman, the Indonesian modernists also identified equality and freedom as Islamic democratic principles.

Importantly, the young modernists seemed to conceptualize equality and free expression as essential prerequisites for the entire Islamic democratic enterprise. In the mid-1970s, Madjid wrote, "a foundational democratic assumption is absolute equality among fellow human beings."[97] After quoting the opening line of the American Declaration of Independence, he urged Indonesians to build a nation that prioritizes social mobility and access to education. In his diary, Wahib worried that Indonesia's hierarchical culture meant that the people did "not yet have a democratic attitude."[98] He further reflected, "no, democracy is actually not located in politics but primarily in social life."[99] They made this prerequisite point even more forcefully about free expression. My discussion of God's mandate above hints at this logic. According to Madjid's reading of the Qur'an, God had named humans His successors on Earth because, among all of His creations, only they possessed the capacity to think and act freely. This argument implies that the sovereignty of the people depends on free thinking. Similarly, Wahib seemed to equate free expression and democracy. He mused that "letting others determine their positions with a feeling of freedom and without fear in accordance with the contents of their own hearts reflects the attitude of a democratic individual" and defined "a democratic attitude" as "possessing faith in oneself and not permitting oneself to surrender to the thinking of the elite (the 'ulama).'"[100] In these ways, the young modernists suggested that, without freedom of expression, in particular, there simply was no hope for building an Islamic democracy.

Majoritarian Fears

Given their emphasis on free expression, the young modernists diagnosed social tyranny as the greatest threat to Indonesian Islam. Their writings are remarkably reminiscent of those of John Stuart Mill. In *On Liberty*, Mill issued a full-throated

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[95]Wahib, *Pergolakan*, 36–37.

[96]Madjid, *Karya Lengkap*, 282–83.

[97]Ibid., 1348.

[98]Wahib, *Pergolakan*, 197.

[99]Ibid., 198.

[100]Ibid., 14, 111.

defense of free expression against what he saw as the dangers of majoritarian tyranny. He argued that civilizations thrive thanks to the creativity of original and even downright eccentric individuals. He explained that these "persons of genius" are "more individual than any other people—less capable, consequently, of fitting themselves, without hurtful compression, into any of the small number of molds which society provides in order to save its members the trouble of forming their own character."[101] He further lamented that society imposes a "tyranny of opinion" that produces mass conformity and leads to "the general tendency of things throughout the world … to render mediocrity the ascendant power among mankind."[102] Only educated, true individuals could escape this stranglehold of the mediocre majority. Mill therefore exhorted society to protect exceptional individuals from the prejudices of, and possibly persecution by, the masses. He also proposed a system of plural voting that would guarantee the educated a greater voice in governance.[103] Overall, Mill believed that both cultural and structural constraints on majoritarian tyranny were essential to reduce the risk of mass conformity, and thereby increase the likelihood that society would flourish.

Like Mill, Indonesia's young modernists expressed deep concerns that the Muslim community suffered from a "tyranny of opinion" that had produced a "stagnation in thought" and even outright "paralysis."[104] In a speech from the early 1970s, Madjid argued that calls for Muslim unity, which seemed innocuous, actually functioned to stifle free thought and expression. This culture of conformity, in turn, rendered Indonesian Islam static: "Because of the absence of fresh thinking, we have already lost […] our psychological striking force. After all, there is no free-thinking body that directs its attention to the pressing demands arising from the conditions of the community, whether in the political, economic, or social spheres."[105] Madjid encouraged young modernists to build such a body, even if doing so meant breaking from the Muslim establishment. Wahib's diary echoed these concerns about the suffocating majority will. He wrote candidly about the pressures to "think within the bounds of *tawhid* (monotheism)."[106] He complained that whenever a Muslim organization or individual did something wrong, Muslims were quick to blame the organization or individual rather than stopping to reflect on whether Islam itself might bear some share of the responsibility. He suggested, "This is one of the manifestations that there is no freedom of thought. People are afraid to consider the possibility that there might be critiques of Islam."[107] From the young modernist perspective, their Masyumi elders used the weight of their doctrines, traditions, and institutions to suffocate the creativity and dynamism necessary for Islam's very vitality.

This young modernist move to castigate their Masyumi elders as a tyrannical majority should, at first glance, raise doubts. Was Masyumi really such a dominant force in the Indonesian Muslim community? What type of power did it possess by the 1970s? Admittedly, since its creation in 1943, Masyumi had never spoken with one

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[101]Mill, *On Liberty*, 62.

[102]Ibid., 63–64.

[103]John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (Luton: Andrews UK Ltd., 2011), 132–34.

[104]Madjid, *Karya Lengkap*, 277–79.

[105]Ibid., 283.

[106]Wahib, *Pergolakan*, 7.

[107]Ibid., 9–10.

voice. The early 1950s saw it fracture into two separate parties: the modernists who retained the Masyumi name and the traditionalists who transformed their religious organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, into a political party. In the 1955 national elections, Masyumi won only one-fifth of the vote. Its political fortunes sank even lower when, in 1960, Sukarno banned the party. Suharto then refused its leaders permission to reconstitute Masyumi as a political organization at the end of the decade.[108] By 1970, Masyumi thus wielded little to no direct political power, and if anything, Pancasila-based nationalism was on the ascent. However, the young modernists were not concerned about *political* majoritarianism, nor were they focused on the intellectual conformity of Indonesia as a whole. Rather, they worried first and foremost about *social* tyranny *within* the Muslim community itself. Seen through this more limited scope, their fears appear, at the very least, plausible. Former Masyumi luminaries, both modernists and traditionalists, remained prominent scholars, publishers, and preachers. They continued to run NU and Muhammadiyah and taught at Islamic primary, secondary, and tertiary schools. Masyumi modernists in particular had significant influence over the Muslim Student Association (Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam / HMI) in the late 1960s.[109] In Yogyakarta, Effendi and Wahib worked tirelessly at persuading their fellow Muslim student activists to reject Masyumi's old platform and embrace instead a model of Islamic politics more open to New Order developmentalism. They were branded as traitors and eventually felt compelled to resign from HMI altogether.[110]

The young modernists also hinted at the pressures they personally felt to conform to the tyranny of Muslim opinion. Madjid spoke about the need to take risks to advance new Islamic interpretations "even if they sound weird to the ears."[111] Wahib reflected that intellectuals must "have the courage to free themselves from the double tyranny … of arrogance and fear."[112] He even judged himself as "less than free in thinking" because free expression "remained an idea rather than a reality that [he] could fully implement."[113] Together, the young modernists worked to marshal the arguments and the will to push back against Muslim social tyranny for the sake of intellectual creativity and dynamism.

The young modernists' first challenge to Masyumi's tyranny of opinion concerned its long-standing demands for an Islamic state. In the late 1960s, Effendi and Wahib joined a small Islamic study club in Yogyakarta, known as the Limited Group. Hosted by future Minister of Religious Affairs Mukti Ali (1923–2004), the Limited Group tackled a series of controversial topics in the hope of helping Muslims better navigate Suharto's New Order. Their longest and most heated conversations revolved around whether Islam was an ideology. For decades, Masyumi leader Mohammad Natsir (1908–1993) had used this definition of Islam to insist that Muslims needed an ideologically Islamic state. Eventually, the Limited Group concluded "that Islam is

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[108]For a detailed history of Masyumi, see Remy Madinier, *Islam and Politics in Indonesia: The Masyumi Party between Democracy and Integralism*, Jeremy Desmond, trans. (Singapore: NUS Press, 2015).

[109]Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 97–98.

[110]Ahmad Gaus AF, *Sang Pelintas Batas: Biografi Djohan Effendi* (Jakarta: Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace, 2009), 66–72.

[111]Madjid, *Karya Lengkap*, 282.

[112]Wahib, *Pergolakan*, 18–19.

[113]Ibid., 37.

not an ideology [and that] ideologizing Islam signified a lowering of Islam."[114] Wahib elaborated on their thinking:

> Mainly, we consider the identification of Islam with democracy and socialism as an outrage against Islam. (It is irrelevant that we recognize ourselves as people who aspire to uphold democracy and socialism.) This idea is closely tied to the consideration that ideologies are human creations, that Islam is not an ideology, that democracy and socialism are merely a political system and an economic system respectively, and that Islam came for all of humanity, which requires a variety of different social systems.[115]

In other words, Islam was more expansive that any merely man-made political ideology. Because Islam existed on a different plain of existence, it was not in competition with democracy, socialism, or Pancasila. It was not a binary choice, and hence, Muslims could be Muslim *and* pro-democracy, pro-socialism, or pro-Pancasila. Madjid took this challenge a step further when he argued that the concept of an Islamic state was nothing more than an "apologetic" invention by modern Muslims. These Muslim apologists had, according to Madjid, encountered totalizing Western ideologies, felt ashamed that they lacked one, and thus transformed Islam into their own political ideology. He saw this transformation as "a distortion of the proportional relationship between religion and the state."[116] With these arguments, the young modernists sought to free Muslims from Masyumi's vision for an Islamic state and open up space for political alternatives, including collaboration with the New Order.

Madjid issued a daring second challenge to Muslim social tyranny in 1970. In a controversial speech, he proposed that secularization (*sekularisasi*) was necessary to revitalize Indonesian Islam. Drawing on the work of American theologian Harvey Cox, Madjid defined secularization as the process of disentangling eternal Islamic truths from man-made religious concepts and institutions. He took pains to distinguish secularism and his vision of secularization. Whereas the former entailed banishing religion from the public sphere, secularization, according to Madjid, would rescue religion from the accumulation of contingent customs and particular political policies. For example, he suggested that the very idea of an Islamic political party, let alone Masyumi's platform, had become an "absolute fossil and had lost all of its dynamism."[117] He further argued that Indonesian Muslims needed secularization because, over the years, they had often confused Islam with man-made symbols, such as certain styles of dress or voting for certain political parties. Madjid's use of the term secularization ignited a national controversy. Masyumi elders denounced him as a secularist traitor to the Islamic cause, and many young Muslims distanced themselves from Madjid's claims to leadership. Despite the searing criticisms, Madjid held his ground. He delivered a series of subsequent speeches to clarify his vision and responded politely but firmly to Muslim opposition.[118] Not only did he propose secularization to combat social tyranny,

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[114]Ibid., 146–50.

[115]Ibid., 151.

[116]Madjid, *Karya Lengkap*, 337.

[117]Ibid., 278.

[118]For more on Madjid's speeches and the resulting controversies, see Barton, "Neo-Modernism," 17–21; Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 116–19; Feener, *Muslim Legal Thought*, 133–37; and Kersten, *Cosmopolitans*, 52–67.

but he also personally modelled how young modernists could withstand the tyranny of opinion in order to build a more open intellectual culture.

Restraining this social tyranny required strategies to balance the majority will with minority rights and insights. Similarly to Mill, the young modernists began by juxtaposing a mediocre majority with an exceptional minority. This elitist distinction led to persistent concerns about the logic of numbers. In the early 1970s, Madjid argued that fellow Muslims called for unity based on the false assumption that there is political strength in numbers. He insisted instead that unity produces stasis and that "quality is more important than quantity."[119] He used this accounting method to justify breaking with established Muslim organizations. Similarly, Wahib often wrote about the need for "a creative minority" that would develop new ideas and push the Muslim masses out of their stagnant slumber.[120] While they strongly supported the principle of people's sovereignty, the young modernists also aimed to carve out space for a non-majoritarian movement to reform and revitalize Indonesian Islam.

Given these concerns about Muslim social tyranny, the young modernists approached Suharto's New Order more as a convenient vehicle for exercising their free speech and less as an authoritarian threat to their Islamic democratic ethos. These priorities are evident in Effendi's reflections on speechwriting for Suharto. He told his biographer that he had only met Suharto once during his twenty years of speech writing and that "Suharto himself may have not known that his speeches were written by [Effendi]." Why, then, did Effendi perform this seemingly thankless task? He explained that he "was happy to do it because, through it, he could spread his thinking to the public. Importantly, he was not asked to write anything with which he disagreed. On the contrary, he wrote whatever he thought" and then handed the words over to the president's staff who decided whether Suharto would use them or not.[121] Effendi valued his freedom of expression over the political consequences of working for Suharto. After Suharto's downfall, Madjid gestured at a similar stance:

> Regarding the view of some observers that my thinking then [the early 1970s] justified the social-political arrangements of the New Order, I think there was indeed that impact. Because, like the French proverb says, "the friend of my friend is my friend. The enemy of my enemy is my friend." As it happens, the New Order was not compatible with Masyumi at that time, and I was not compatible with Masyumi. I therefore became a "friend" of the New Order. That is where there is a problem with the claim, especially that it was akin to some covert operation or an intelligence matter. They usually claim "Oh, that is my man." We were just traveling along parallel paths [*Jadi ada paralelisme saja.*].[122]

Although Madjid denied any intentional or covert collaboration with Suharto's New Order, he did not actively thwart his coincidental "friendship" with the regime. For the young modernists, ensuring the freedom to express their reformist vision and combatting the social tyranny of Masyumi trumped any concerns over New Order authoritarianism.

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[119]Madjid, *Karya Lengkap*, 279.
[120]Wahib, *Pergolakan*, 157, 208, 291.
[121]Gaus, *Sang Pelintas Batas*, 106.
[122]Madjid, *Karya Lengkap*, xlvii–iii.

Of course, the young modernists generally ignored the New Order's forceful suppression of the Indonesian left, ranging from book bans to extrajudicial detentions to mass executions.[123] Their willingness to tolerate Suharto's rampant violations of leftist freedoms is troubling. A generous reading might suggest that young modernists compartmentalized their majoritarian fears. Following the violent destruction of the Indonesian Communist Party and its associates in 1965–1966, they viewed Masyumi as the largest remaining threat to Muslim free expression. They could not change the past, but they could fight for a more open public discourse in the present. Similarly, the young modernists might have concluded that the New Order was simply too powerful to oppose but that they could, at least, constrain the social tyranny of the Muslim establishment. A less generous reading might attribute their relative silence about the left to indifference or even tacit approval. The young modernists might have reasoned that because the New Order's suppression of the left did not hamper *their* freedom of expression, the regime did not pose a significant threat to their Islamic democratic vision. Or, worse still, perhaps they concluded that the left did not deserve the same freedoms because communists had transgressed some nationalist or religious line in the sand. In hindsight, it is difficult to judge which reading is most apt. Regardless, it is clear that young modernist fears of a tyrannical majority did not extend to the very real mobs, many of them Muslim and empowered by Suharto's military, that attacked Indonesian communists in the mid-1960s. Overall, I do not wish to downplay or excuse Madjid's, Effendi's, or (to a lesser extent) Wahib's willingness to cooperate with Suharto's brutal authoritarian regime. Rather, I argue that we should not separate that willingness from their Islamic democratic vision. As paradoxical as it may seem, they were more concerned about the threat of social tyranny than the exercise of raw political power in Jakarta and therefore chose to focus on combatting the former, even if it meant benefiting the latter.

Conclusion

In the end, fears of a tyrannical majority led both Fazlur Rahman and Indonesia's young modernists to adopt a gradualist approach for achieving their Islamic democratic visions. Because he worried about demagogues and the uneducated masses, Rahman endorsed a series of structural constraints on majoritarian political power. He also campaigned for extending education to the Pakistani masses in order to equip average Muslims with the skills to think critically and represent their true interests. Indonesia's young modernists implored their fellow Muslim intellectuals to cherish their God-given rights to free expression and to exercise them with creativity and courage. They sought to restrain Muslim social tyranny *first* so as to give their Islamic democratic vision a chance to survive, let alone thrive. Although both Rahman and the young modernists preferred the realm of ideas, they entered the political arena and judged their respective authoritarian regimes as the best means to counterbalance, restrain, and/or reform the tyrannical majority.

As we have seen, Muslim modernists are not alone in wrestling with fears of a tyrannical majority and incorporating anti-majoritarian counterweights into their

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[123]Wahib and Effendi did take personal actions to protect leftist friends; Wahib, *Pergolakan*, 30–31, 184, 223–24; Gaus, *Sang Pelintas Batas*, 36, 68–69.

democratic advocacy. The founding fathers of American democracy engaged in a similar balancing act. After all, it was John Adams who coined the term "tyranny of the majority" and Hamilton and Madison who devised structural strategies to constrain it. Nearly a century later, the great British theorist of liberty, John Stuart Mill, advanced new principles for how a democratic society could limit the power of the majority and ensure space for minority expression. More recently, committed democrats in the United States, Europe, the Philippines, and other countries across the globe have struggled with how to protect democratic principles in the face of surging and aggressive populist movements. More than a few supporters of the American Democratic Party hoped that Special Counsel Robert Mueller or the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) would thwart the will of Donald Trump's populist administration, and some even joked nervously about the possible democratic benefits of a military coup. In the last decade, Germany's defensive democracy has taken concrete steps to monitor and even curtail political mobilization on the far right that it deems a threat to the country's pluralist democracy. Preventing the rise of a tyrannical majority and/or limiting its worst excesses pose real dilemmas for democrats worldwide. As a result, scholars must avoid exceptionalizing Muslim modernists and their authoritarian alliances. If Western liberal democrats can devise creative constraints to prevent majoritarian tyranny, then do not Muslim democrats deserve similar opportunities to innovate? Conversely, if the constraints proposed by Muslim modernists render them beyond the pale of democratic theory, then should we not apply that same logic to Hamilton, Madison, Mill, and militant democrats in contemporary Europe?[124]

Likewise, this article demonstrates that Western philosophers and political thinkers have no monopoly on theorizing about the tyranny of the majority. Muslim modernists might not deploy the same terminology or publish in the same academic journals, but they do grapple with the same tensions in their writings and activism. Indeed, Muslim scholars have likely done *more* theorizing on the tyranny of the majority than their Western counterparts have in recent decades, given the long reign of post-World War II Anglo-American democratic triumphalism and the prevalence of populist movements in many Asian and African countries.[125] Rather than exceptionalizing or marginalizing Muslim modernists, scholars should embrace them as experienced interlocutors and utilize their writings for a new wave of comparative theorizing on our shared dilemma: tyrannical majorities.

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[124]This latter question becomes all the more relevant when we consider the extent to which the earlier Western democrats were involved in Native American genocide, slavery, and imperialism.

[125]Nyirkos, *Tyranny*, 103–5.