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Power and Piety:

Religion, State and Society in Muslim Countries

There is the logical possibility of the creation of a Muslim society that is characterised by high levels of trust in and esteem for the State, and in which there is also a high level of trust in religious institutions. However, as far as we know, there are no contemporary examples of such a situation that can be readily identified. This raises the interesting question of why this is so. Does it mean that such a situation is not possible, or could such a situation possibly come about under circumstances in which different political arrangements prevail between Islam and the State? The author argues that the findings reported in this article will stimulate further debate and discussion on the relationship between the State and religious institutions in Muslim countries and help them move from the actual to the ideal.

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The relationship between religion and the state in Muslim countries has become a much debated and widely discussed issue among Islamic scholars and Muslim societies. A commonly stated view of many Western and Muslim scholars, as well as Islamic activists, is that Islam is not only a religion but it is also a blueprint for social order. It therefore encompasses all domains of life, including law and the state. It is

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then argued that this striking characteristic is what sets Muslim societies apart from Western counterparts that are based upon the separation of the state and religion. This paper reports empirical evidence, which shows that institutional configurations form an important factor in mediating and articulating the nature of the relationship between religion, the state and society in Muslim countries. The empirical evidence indicates that, in general, the trust in religious institutions and their public influence is greater in Muslim countries with differentiated institutional configurations than in those with undifferentiated ones. This paper offers some theoretical underpinnings for these and other findings.

Introduction

What types of political systems are compatible with Islam? Are Islam and democracy compatible? Questions such as these have become a focus of intense debate among scholars. A commonly stated view of many Western and Muslim scholars is that Islam is not only a religion but also a blueprint for social order, and therefore encompasses all domains of life, including law and the state (Maududi 1960; Lewis 1993; Huntington 1993a; Weber 1978; Gellner 1981). Consequently, this characterization sets Islamic societies apart from Western ones, which are based upon the separation of state and religious institutions.

In reality, Muslims societies have had a wide range of governments, including the Caliphate, monarchy, military dictatorship, dictatorship, communism, national socialism, theocracy, religious fascism and democracy. This would suggest that, like other religious traditions, Islam possesses intellectual and theological resources that could provide the foundation for a wide range of political systems. According to Islamic scholars, like Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi, the Western democratic system is not appropriate for Islamic countries because the election system has no place in Islam. Islam calls for a government of advice and consultation, and holds the ruler responsible before the people. This view is widely supported by Islamists and is echoed by fundamentalists. However, it is contested by Islamic jurists who take a different position, claiming that: “democracy is an appropriate system for Islam because it both expresses the special worth of human beings — the status of

vicegerency — and at the same time deprives the state of any pretence of divinity by locating ultimate authority in the hands of people rather than the *ulema*” (Abou El Fadl 2004: 36).

Other reformist Muslim leaders take different positions. Former Iranian president, Mohammad Khatami, referring to the Iranian model, has suggested that existing democratic systems do not follow one path. Just as democracy can lead to a liberal or socialist system, it can also accommodate the inclusion of religious norms in the government. Former Indonesian president, the late Abdurrahman Wahid, has suggested that Muslims have two choices: to pursue a traditional, static, and legal-formalistic Islam, or to follow a more dynamic, cosmopolitan, universal, and pluralistic Islam. He rejects the notion of an Islamic state, which he regards as a ‘Middle Eastern tradition.’ For Indonesia, he advocates a moderate, pluralistic, and tolerant Islam that treats Muslims and non-Muslims equally, and one that can form the basis of a state in which religion and politics are kept separate (Wahid 1983).

These views of Muslim political and intellectual leaders illustrate that the Islamic world might not offer an ideal functioning democracy, but neither does it offer an ideal functioning Islamic polity. Though their views differ, these views essentially reflect the political reality of the Muslim world, which encompasses a variety of ‘functioning’ political systems. Are these differences indicative of vastly different political attitudes? The empirical evidence suggests otherwise. A comparison of political values and attitudes shows remarkable similarities between Muslim and Western countries. For example, the approval rates for indicators of ‘democratic performance’ and ‘democratic ideals,’ and the disapproval rates for strong leaders are identical for Muslim and Western countries (see Norris and Inglehart 2003).

While a comparison of political and social values in Muslim and Western countries could shed significant light on current debates concerning the Clash of Civilizations theory, it does not provide many insights about how attitudes toward various institutions, in particular Islamic ones, vary in Muslim countries. The aim of this paper is to fill this gap by offering empirical evidence on the relationship between power and piety or politics and religion in Muslim countries by exploring differences in attitudes toward Islamic institutions and the sociological factors producing these

differences.

A number of scholars of Muslim societies, including American historians Ira Lapidus (1996) and Nikki Keddie (1994), have disputed the view that Islamic societies are different from their Western counterparts because of integration of religion and politics. After reviewing the evidence concerning the separation of state and religion in Islamic history, Lapidus (1996) concludes that the history of the Muslim world reveals two main institutional configurations. Characteristic of lineage or tribal societies, the undifferentiated state-religious configuration can be found in a small number of Middle Eastern societies. In contrast, the historical norm for agro-urban Islamic societies is an institutional configuration that recognizes the division between state and religious spheres.

Despite the common statement (and the Muslim ideal according to some) that the institutions of state and religion are unified, and that Islam is a total way of life that defines political as well as social and family matters, most Muslim societies did not conform to this ideal, but were built around separate institutions of state and religion (Lapidus 1996:24). Keddie (1994: 463) has described the supposed near-identity of religion and the state in Islam as “more a pious myth than reality for most of Islamic history”.

Relationship between State and Religion

The weight of historical scholarship indicates that the institutional configurations of Islamic societies can be classified into two types: (1) differentiated social formations (i.e., societies in which religion and state occupy different spaces), and (2) undifferentiated social formations (i.e., societies in which religion and state are integrated). While a majority of Islamic societies have been and are ‘differentiated social formations,’ a small but significant number of them can be classified as ‘undifferentiated social formations.’ A label commonly used in contemporary discourse for undifferentiated Muslim social formations is the ‘Islamic state.’

Irrespective of the historical evidence, relations between the state and religion are an important issue in contemporary Muslim countries. Many Muslim countries are a product of the process of decolonization in this century, during which nationalist movements were spearheaded by relatively secular leaders. These new states have defined their identities in nationalist terms and, in many cases, have preserved secular legal, educational, and political institutions inherited from the colonial era. However, Islamic revival movements have emerged in many Muslim countries and, in general, they denounce the trend toward secularization, calling for the return to a state that represents and embodies Islam and enforces an Islamic way of life (Lapidus 1996; Beinin and Stork 1997; Esposito 1992; Marty and Appleby 1993).

Whereas in the past only Saudi Arabia defined itself as an Islamic state, now countries such as Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Sudan have become or aspire to become Islamic states, and while all of them define themselves and function as Islamic states, they differ from one another in many significant ways. In Turkey, the power of the Kemalist secular state has come under muted challenge from the rise of Islamic parties as dominant political actors, as signified by the now ruling Justice and Development Party.

Institutional Configurations and Trust in Religious Institutions

Although relations between the state, religious and societal institutions represent a significant concern for the Islamic world, there has been no empirical study of the attitudes of Muslims toward different institutional configurations. The issue here is whether religious institutions enjoy more or less trust in the public mind in differentiated Muslim social formations (in which religion and the state are separate) than in undifferentiated Muslim social formations (in which religion and the state are closely integrated). Public trust in institutions of the state and civil society is an important symbol of the political legitimacy of the state and its agencies. Drawing from empirical evidence gathered as part of my seven country study, we can now examine this issue by comparing data about the level of trust in the state and civil society institutions in different Muslim countries, and about the level of trust in undifferentiated and differentiated Muslim social formations.

The respondents in all seven countries were asked how much trust they had in key institutions of the state and civil society. The specific question that elicited this information was: “I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much you trust them to tell the truth and to do what is best for the country? Is it a great deal of trust, quite a lot of trust, not very much trust, or none at all; or do you not know?” The institutions about which the respondents’ opinions were sought were the following:

- *Ulema*²; *Parliament*; *Press*; *Universities*; *Imam masjid*³; *Courts*; *Television*; *Schools*; *Pir / kyai*⁴; *Civil service*; *Major companies*; *Intellectuals*; *Political parties*; *Armed forces*

In Iran, the institutions of *ulema*, *pir*, and the armed forces were excluded from the main survey (number of respondents = 469), but they were included in an exploratory survey (number of respondents = 66).

Trust in Institutions

As mentioned earlier, relations between the state, religious institutions and communities are a central concern in the Islamic world. But surprisingly there have been no systematic empirical investigations of the subject. In this respect, the research findings reported in this paper fill an important gap in our knowledge. The general issue examined was the level of trust in religious institutions and the institutions of civil society, in undifferentiated Muslim social formations (i.e., Islamic states) and in differentiated Muslim social formations.

For the computation of the trust scores from the data reported here, the two categories of ‘a great deal of trust’ and ‘quite a lot of trust’ were combined to arrive at a composite index of trust. The findings of the survey data reported in Table 1 show

² *Ulema* refers to scholars, jurists, and teachers learned in the Islamic sciences. For a general discussion of the nature and functions of the Islamic institutions of *ulema*, *imam masjid*, and *pir / kyai*, see Keddie (1972).

³ *Imam masjid* are the leaders of the daily mandatory prayers in Muslim mosques. See Keddie (1972).

⁴ *Pir* and *kyai* are leaders of folk or popular Islam. The nomenclature used to describe or refer to this institution varies in different countries. See Keddie (1972), Mayer (1967), Gellner (1968a), and Dhofier (1980).

wide variations as well as similarities among respondents in the seven countries in terms of their trust in core institutions of religion and the state. Kazakhstan stands out as a country whose Muslims universally have very low confidence in key institutions of society. This is most likely a function of the dramatic changes that have occurred in Kazakhstan over the past two decades.

Many Kazaks were disillusioned and very apprehensive about the future, and the data reflects this view. In relative terms, roughly three out of ten respondents trusted the armed forces, the press, television, universities, and intellectuals. However, the religious institutions of the *ulema*, *imam masjid*, and *pir* enjoyed much more trust than the key institutions of the state. This is rather surprising, given that most Kazaks were not actively involved in religion during the Soviet era. Kazakhstan would need to be considered a special case. The other six countries can be compared with greater confidence.

Indonesia, Egypt, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan, unlike Kazakhstan, are large, predominantly Muslim countries that have been ruled by the indigenous ruling classes for at least half a century. Malaysia is closer to Kazakhstan demographically in terms of size and composition. However, the Muslims in Malaysia, unlike in Kazakhstan, are well-known for their devotion to Islam. Key state institutions—namely, parliament, the courts, the civil service, and political parties—enjoyed moderate to low levels of trust in the public mind. Political parties were held in especially low public esteem in Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Iran, and Turkey. Levels of trust in state institutions were lowest in Kazakhstan and Iran, and highest in Malaysia. The armed forces were trusted by a considerable majority of the respondents in all countries except Iran and Kazakhstan. In Malaysia, Pakistan, and Egypt, the armed forces enjoyed comparatively higher levels of trust and were among the most trusted institutions in the public mind.

Table 1: Trust in Key Institutions in Selected Muslim Societies
(In %)

| Institution | Pakistan | Indonesia | Egypt | Kazakhstan | Iran | Turkey | Malaysia |
|-------------------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------|-------------------|-------------|---------------|-----------------|
| <i>Ulema</i> | 48 | 96 | 90 | 24 | 7* | 28 | 95 |
| <i>Imam masjid</i> | 44 | 94 | 83 | 22 | 36 | 26 | 94 |
| <i>Pir /kyai /ustaz</i> | 21 | 91 | 52 | 21 | 8* | 18 | 91 |
| Political parties | 12 | 35 | 28 | 12 | 10 | 3 | 44 |
| Parliament | 22 | 53 | 34 | 19 | 32 | 11 | 69 |
| Courts | 55 | 55 | 76 | 16 | 28 | 37 | 73 |
| Civil service | 26 | 58 | 44 | 11 | 23 | 22 | 61 |
| Armed forces | 82 | 68 | 78 | 33 | 29 | 68 | 85 |
| Press | 38 | 84 | 54 | 33 | 24 | 4 | 68 |
| Television | 31 | 80 | 49 | 37 | 30 | 9 | 72 |
| Major companies | 29 | 42 | 45 | 14 | 16 | 27 | 46 |
| Schools | 71 | 92 | 68 | 48 | 46 | 57 | 87 |
| Universities | 60 | 88 | 70 | 33 | 44 | 58 | 83 |
| Intellectuals | 66 | 92 | 81 | 37 | 59 | 67 | 91 |

* These percentages are from a subsample of 66 respondents.

Source: Hassan 2008

The most striking differences between the countries, however, relate to trust in Islamic institutions. In Indonesia, Malaysia, and Egypt, the *ulema* and the *imam masjid* were the most trusted institutions of civil society. The institutions of *pir*, *kyai* and *ustaz* (religious teachers/experts) were very highly trusted in Malaysia and Indonesia, and moderately in Egypt. In Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Turkey, and Iran, the

level of trust in religious institutions was low. The main survey in Iran ascertained only the level of trust in *imam masjid*, and it was found to be the lowest among the countries surveyed. In Iran, a smaller preliminary survey (number of respondents = 66) did include the questions about trust in *ulema* and *pir*, and the findings revealed a very low level of trust in these institutions. The preliminary survey covered mainly middle- and upper-middle-class respondents from Tehran. However, for proper comparison, only the data pertaining to *imam masjid* should be considered as comparable. The institutions of *pir*, *kyai* and *ustaz* were very highly trusted in Malaysia and Indonesia. In general, less than half of the respondents trusted religious institutions in Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Iran, and Turkey. In contrast, a large majority in the other three countries trusted these institutions.

Three other institutions that were trusted by a significant majority of the respondents in Indonesia, Malaysia, Egypt, Turkey, and Pakistan were intellectuals, universities, and schools. The level of trust in these three institutions was particularly high in Indonesia and Malaysia. Mass media institutions did well in winning public trust in Indonesia and Malaysia; moderately in Egypt, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, and Iran; but abysmally in Turkey. Perhaps the most surprising result is the low levels of trust in religious institutions in Iran and Pakistan. These are the only countries in the study that can be categorized as undifferentiated societies (i.e., Islamic states). These findings were counterintuitive. The patterns discerned in the differentiated societies were mixed. Indonesia, Malaysia and Egypt displayed very high levels of trust, but that was not the case in Turkey and Kazakhstan. For reasons mentioned earlier, Kazakhstan can be regarded as a special case. This leaves Turkey as the only differentiated society with low public esteem in religious institutions. However, this does not mean that religious institutions there do not enjoy public trust and influence. The success of the Justice and Development Party in Turkish elections clearly suggests that they do. The evidence reported in Table 1 and the recent political developments in Turkey themselves allow us to come to a cautious conclusion that religious institutions enjoy a higher level of public trust and influence in differentiated Muslim social formations.

These findings are interesting because this is the first time such an empirical study has been carried out in seven Muslim communities in different regions of the world, and

in different social formations. Intuitively, one would expect that, since Iran and Pakistan are the only undifferentiated (Islamic) states among the seven countries under study, the level of trust in religious institutions should be relatively high. The results are the *exact opposite*. It is also worth mentioning that one does not hear that religious institutions are held in such high esteem in Indonesia, Malaysia and Egypt. In relative terms, even the trust shown in religious institutions in Kazakhstan, as compared with state institutions, was surprising. In view of this evidence, we can say that the faith lines in contemporary Indonesian, Malaysian and Egyptian societies are very clearly delineated. The state institutions were held in low to moderate esteem, while religious institutions were held in the highest esteem. In Iran and Pakistan, both state and religious institutions were held in low esteem and a similar pattern prevailed in Kazakhstan. The pattern in Turkey was more complex. With the exception of the courts, the institutions of the state were held in low public esteem. Religious institutions enjoyed more consistent levels of public trust. While the level of trust in religious institutions in Turkey was relatively low, the electoral victories by the Justice and Development Party in the past decade would suggest that religion does enjoy a significant level of trust among the Turks.

Analysis of the relationship between the level of trust in religious institutions and the level of trust in key institutions of the state showed that an increase in trust in religious institutions is associated with increased trust in institutions of the state in all countries.

Role of Religious Institutions in Society

The research also investigated the relationship between institutional configurations of the state and attitudes toward the role of religious institutions in society in Malaysia, Iran and Turkey. Respondents in these countries were asked the following: There is much debate these days about the appropriate role that religious institutions should play in a modern society. Please indicate which *one* of the following statements comes closest to expressing your opinion.

A. Religious instructions should focus on religious affairs only.

B. Religious institutions should be involved in political matters whenever it is necessary.

C. Religious institutions should play an important role in the government.

The countries were selected on the basis of their contrasting or different institutional configurations. Turkey was selected because it is the most secular country - strict separation between religion and the state is enshrined in its constitution. Iran was selected because, under its constitution, it is an Islamic state, and the state is expressly required to govern the country according to Islamic law. This fusion of politics and religion is also enshrined in its constitution. Malaysia has different institutional configurations from Turkey and Iran. It is a constitutional monarchy and, although religion and state are theoretically separate, Islam is the official religion of the state. The role of Islam has been increasing gradually in political and public affairs. In some states (provinces) of Malaysia, the Islamic party PAS wields significant political influence; in the state of Kelantan, it is the ruling party. It was also the ruling party in the state of Terengganu until it lost power some years ago.

The evidence reported in Table 2 shows striking differences in the attitudes of Turkish, Iranian and Malaysian respondents. In strictly secular Turkey, 74% of respondents said religious institutions should focus on religious affairs. Only 11% favoured religious institutions playing an important role in the government; another 14% favoured an interventionist role for religious institutions when necessary. Respondents from the Islamic Republic of Iran saw the role of religious institutions differently. Unlike the Turkish Muslims, only 5% of Iranians were in favour of religious institutions confining their role strictly to religious affairs. Of those surveyed, 43% favoured religion playing an important role in society; 52% favoured the involvement of religious institutions in politics whenever necessary.

Table 2: “What Is the Role of the Religious Institution?”

Agreement by country, sex, age group, and education level (in %)

| Demographic Variable | Iran | | | Malaysia | | | Turkey | | |
|--------------------------------------|------|----|----|----------|----|----|--------|----|----|
| | A | B | C | A | B | C | A | B | C |
| All respondents | 5 | 52 | 43 | 14 | 18 | 66 | 74 | 14 | 11 |
| Gender | | | | | | | | | |
| Male | 6 | 46 | 48 | 14 | 18 | 68 | 70 | 16 | 14 |
| Female | 5 | 59 | 37 | 14 | 19 | 67 | 80 | 13 | 8 |
| Age | | | | | | | | | |
| Under 26 | 6 | 53 | 41 | 11 | 20 | 69 | 74 | 15 | 12 |
| 26-40 | 6 | 52 | 43 | 13 | 20 | 67 | 78 | 15 | 7 |
| 41-55 | 2 | 46 | 52 | 18 | 17 | 66 | 69 | 15 | 15 |
| Over 56 | 8 | 58 | 33 | 24 | 18 | 59 | 74 | 5 | 21 |
| Education | | | | | | | | | |
| Less than high school | 7 | 58 | 36 | 18 | 17 | 65 | 70 | 14 | 16 |
| High school | 6 | 48 | 46 | 12 | 18 | 70 | 73 | 16 | 11 |
| University or professional education | 5 | 57 | 38 | 12 | 21 | 68 | 83 | 13 | 3 |

A = Religious institutions should focus on religious affairs only.

B = Religious institutions should be involved in political matters whenever it is necessary.

C = Religious institutions should play an important role in the government.

The results for Malaysia were different from those for Turkey and Iran. The pattern was almost the direct opposite of that seen in Turkey. Two-thirds of Malaysians were in favour of religion (i.e., Islam) playing an important role in government; the remaining respondents were divided almost equally between the other two stated roles for religious institutions. These results clearly show that different institutional

configurations have an impact on public attitudes. Most Muslim countries in the world are probably closer to the Malaysian state in their institutional configurations. And if Malaysian attitudes are an indicator of public attitudes, then we should expect vigorous support for a more interventionist role for religion in governmental affairs. A state that wishes to confine the role of Islam to religious affairs only might have to frame constitutions similar to Turkey's and have the political will to ensure that constitutional provisions about the role of religion are strictly enforced.

Discussion

What could be a possible explanation of these findings and what are their sociological implications? An explanatory hypothesis could be constructed in the following way. Given that, in all of the societies under study, there is a relatively low level of trust in key state institutions, we could hypothesize that a dialectical process is created by the social and political conditions within which key state institutions enjoy only low levels of esteem—and consequently political legitimacy—among citizens.

The main business of the state is to govern and manage the affairs of society in a fair and unbiased manner. When the state or its key institutions lack social/political legitimacy in the public mind, the state must use varying degrees of coercion to ensure compliance. The citizens will inevitably resist such an approach, which in turn produces a more authoritarian state response. This generates further resistance and so a cycle of authoritarian response and resistance develops. The state ultimately comes to be seen as authoritarian, oppressive and unfair and this leads to political mobilization against the state. The institutions of civil society that act as the mobilizer of this resistance gain public trust and consequently come to enjoy high levels of esteem and legitimacy among the public.

This model could explain the high level of trust in religious, as well as other, institutions of civil society—such as schools, universities, and public intellectuals—in Indonesia and Egypt. Since both of these societies are examples of what we have called differentiated Muslim social formations, religious institutions play a vital

public role in the mobilization of resistance to the state, thereby increasing the esteem with which they are held in the public mind. Universities, schools, and public intellectuals are also held in high esteem for the same reason. In Pakistan and Iran, however, the situation is different. Pakistan and Iran, as we have argued, are undifferentiated social formations in which religious institutions are integrated into the state structures. The erosion of trust in state institutions, therefore, also corrodes trust in religious institutions that are perceived as part of the state. Schools, intellectuals and universities are probably trusted because of their role as mobilizers of resistance against a state perceived as weak, ineffectual, and authoritarian. The low level of trust in religious institutions in Pakistan and Iran further reduces the trust in state institutions. In the case of Kazakhstan, the disintegration of the former Soviet Union has resulted in unparalleled political, social, and economic insecurity and the low level of trust in all institutions is probably indicative of that insecurity. Again, the logic behind the model applied in the case of Indonesia, Egypt, Iran, and Pakistan can also be applied to Kazakhstan.

The high level of trust in the armed forces could be a function of the underlying dynamics of the proposed model. The state's lack of legitimacy might create or aggravate an underlying sense of insecurity among the people. It might be that this sense of insecurity produces a positive perception of the armed forces that helps compensate for the perceived sense of insecurity. In Pakistan, the very high level of trust in the armed forces could also stem from public perceptions of a military and political threat from India, which the Pakistan government promotes as a matter of public policy to justify its huge allocations of public revenues to the armed forces.

An alternative explanation of the findings can also be constructed by applying the late German sociologist, Niklas Luhmann's typology of the role of religion in modern society. According to Luhmann (1977, 1982), institutional differentiation and functional specialization form a distinctive feature of modern society. They give rise to autonomous 'functional instrumentalities' such as polity, law, economy, science, education, health, art, family, and religion. One consequence of the increased institutional autonomy in modern societies is that major institutions become independent of religious norms and values, a process that Luhmann calls 'secularization.' In such conditions, the degree of public influence that the religion

enjoys depends on how it relates to other social systems in society. Luhmann uses the terms ‘function’ and ‘performance’ to analyse this relationship.

‘Function’ in this context refers to ‘pure’ religious communication, variously called devotion and worship, the care of souls, the search for salvation, and enlightenment. ‘Function’ is the pure, social communication involving the transcendent and the aspect that religious institutions claim for themselves on the basis of their autonomy in modern society. Religious ‘performance’ in contrast, occurs when religion is ‘applied’ to problems generated in other institutional systems, but not solved there or simply not addressed anywhere else, such as economic poverty, corruption and political oppression, among other issues. Religious institutions gain public influence through the ‘performance’ role by addressing these non-religious or ‘profane’ problems. The functional problem of religion in modern society is a performance problem.

Religious institutions gain public influence when they efficiently carry out their performance role. This requires religious institutions to be autonomous vis-à-vis the state and other institutional subsystems. A logical deduction from this premise is that religious institutions will gain greater public influence in institutional configurations in which they are autonomous from the state. If they are not, then they cannot carry out their performance function effectively. This model is articulated in Table 4. In the context of the study presented here, this means that religious institutions will enjoy, at least theoretically, greater public influence in a differentiated social formation than in an undifferentiated state social formation. The findings of this study would appear to support Luhmann’s analysis.

Table 4: Differentiated vs. Undifferentiated Social Foundations

By functional vs. performance roles

| Role of Religion | Undifferentiated Social Formation | Differentiated Social Formation |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Functional role | High | Low |
| Performance role | Low | High |

Viewed from these perspectives, the findings might have important implications for the institutional configuration of the state in Muslim countries. An Islamic state that lacks trust — and consequently political legitimacy — in the public mind might in fact cause an erosion of trust in Islamic institutions, thereby further weakening the fabric of civil society. For the religious elite in Muslim countries, the message conveyed by these findings is that an Islamic state might not always be in the best interests of Islamic institutions and the religious elite. To promote a constructive sociocultural, moral, and religious role for religious institutions within a Muslim society, it might be prudent to keep faith lines separate from the state, and thereby prevent them from becoming the fault lines of the political terrain.

These findings also have implications for the ruling elite, particularly in differentiated Muslim societies. As we have noted, the findings show a feedback effect. The level of trust in religious institutions is directly related to the level of trust in institutions of the state. This means that attempts to disestablish Islam could have adverse consequences for the level of trust in the state and for the legitimacy of the state itself. The implication for the international community is that if an Islamic state (i.e., an undifferentiated Muslim social formation) were to come into existence through democratic and constitutional means, support for such a state could, in the long run, pave the way for the development of a type of differentiated Muslim social formation.

As in the case of Pakistan and Iran, the Islamic elite might need to make some compromises with the state over time to ensure a stronger sociocultural, moral, and political role for religion in the society at large. We could call this a type of ‘secularization’ of religion that manifests itself in calls to limit the political role of religion.

In summary, the findings show that the integration of religion and the state in Muslim countries might not always be in the best interests of Islamic institutions and the religious elite, because when a state fails to inspire trust in its citizens, public trust in religious institutions is also eroded. This could have serious social, cultural, political, and religious implications. For example, if the public lacks trust in the institutions of the *ulema* and *imam masjid*, this could significantly undermine the economic and social well-being of these institutions, and lead them to create circumstances or

support demands that might not be conducive to the profession and promotion of the universality. (Here one can speculate about the influence of the *madrasah* [religious schools] in Pakistan on the rise of the Taliban political and religious movement in neighbouring Afghanistan.⁵) If this hypothesis is accurate, one inference that can be drawn is that religious institutions within a Muslim society continue to play a constructive social, cultural, and religious role when religion is kept separate from the state and when these institutions enjoy an appropriate place in the institutional configurations of the society. It might be prudent, therefore, to keep faith separate from the state.

Because of the feedback effect related to the level of trust in religious institutions that has been noted earlier, the findings of this paper might also have implications for the relationship between the state and religion in Muslim countries. As the level of trust in religious institutions is related directly to the level of trust in institutions of the state, it follows that attempts to destabilize Islam might have adverse consequences for the level of trust in the state and for the legitimacy of the state itself. It has also been argued that the undifferentiated Muslim social formation tends to evolve over time towards a type of differentiated Muslim social formation. An Islamic state, therefore, might also provide a route to the social and political development of Muslim societies in which religion and state coexist in an autonomous, but mutually cooperative, relationship.

There is, of course, the logical possibility of a Muslim society that is characterized by high levels of trust in and esteem for the state, and in which there is also a high level of trust in religious institutions. However, as far as we know, there are no contemporary examples of such a situation that can be readily identified. This raises the interesting question of why this is so. Does it mean that such a situation is not possible, or could such a situation possibly come about under circumstances in which different political arrangements prevail between Islam and the state? I hope that this question, as well as the findings reported here, will stimulate further debate and discussion on the relationship between the state and religious institutions in Muslim countries.

⁵ For an elaboration and discussion of this issue, see Rashid (1998).

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