A case for democratic pluralism instead of democratic minimalism

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This paper proposes a theory of democratic pluralism instead of democratic minimalism developed by Shadi Hamid in his book "The Problem of Democracy". Democratic pluralism will leverage pluralism to create a possibility for reconciliation between liberalism, secularism, religion, and democracy. It presents a framework of democratic pluralism based on four key elements: (1) a conception of democracy that includes performance and political action in the public sphere beyond electoral participation; (2) recognition of diversity and intercultural dialog, alongside the agonistic dimension of pluralism; (3) moderation of individual autonomy and identity politics; and (4) pluralistic accommodation of religion. The paper critiques Hamid's monolithic notions of liberalism, secularism, and democracy, suggesting that more nuanced approaches to these concepts are necessary. It contends that rather than abandoning liberalism and secularism, exploring compatible versions of liberalism and Islam within a pluralistic framework offers a more promising path for reforming religion and polity in the Muslim world.

Introduction

Shadi Hamid's theory of democratic minimalism is more accurately about the problem of liberalism. It comes at a time when liberalism is in tension, if not in crisis, both in America and around the world. In the West, the problem is multi-faceted, ranging from eroding trust in liberal democratic institutions to the rise of populism, and democratic backsliding. The tension has made many scholars reflect on what went wrong.

In the Muslim world, the tension is older, deeper, and more classic in nature. It is between Islam and its Sharia as a moral system and liberalism as a hegemonic global paradigm. Presupposing that the incompatibility of liberalism with Islam rendered democracy impossible in the region, democratic minimalism suggests the decoupling of liberalism and democracy as a solution. It argues that democracy prevails if we abandon liberalism and secularism. In policy terms, it suggests the US not pursue liberalism and secularism as an end to its relations with the Muslim world. In doing so, it perpetuates a monolithic notion of liberalism, secularism, and Islamism. This paper constructively deconstructs democratic minimalism's monoliths. It suggests that, instead of abandoning liberalism and secularism, one has to explore which versions of liberalism and Islam could be compatible with a pluralistic order. Moreover, instead of placing democracy as the end state, the Muslim world should consider pluralism as a framework to reform religion and polity. This would necessitate a more nuanced approach toward liberalism, eschewing mere rejection or adoption.

This paper suggests democratic pluralism based on at least four key elements (1) a notion of democracy based on political action in the public sphere besides electoral participation (2) recognition of cultural diversity, and intercultural dialog along with the agonistic dimension of pluralism; (3) moderation of individual autonomy and identity politics; and (4) twin tolerance as a standard of pluralist secularism.

What does democratic minimalism entail?

Hamid builds the theory of democratic minimalism based on segregating values that he does not consider intrinsic to democracy. In this analysis, only democratic legitimacy, political stability, and the peaceful transfer of power are intrinsically related to democracy (Hamid, 2023 p. 53). In other words, the purpose of democracy at the minimalist level is its ability to function as a mechanism for conflict resolution. He argues that values such as liberalism and social justice or issues such as economic development are not intrinsic values of democracy; rather, they are by-products of democracy or accidentally attached to democracy (Hamid, 2023 p. 54). However, it is not clear from the Hamid's analysis who is to decide what is intrinsic to democracy and what is not. The choices are arbitrary. Why should stability be considered intrinsic to democracy but economic development not be? In other words, how is short-term stability minimal to be accepted as inherent to a minimalistic democracy?

The Hamid reconceptualizes the Schumpeterian notion of democracy with a particular policy mandate. Although the Hamid's main critique of the Schumpeterian notion of democracy is its instrumentalization of democracy as a particular mechanism of elite decision-making, he reproduces a different version of instrumentalized democracy. For Hamid, a minimalist notion of democracy is a means to reorient the US foreign policy in West Asia and North Africa (WANA)[1] from endorsing liberal autocrats to supporting democracies where Islamists may come to power. Moreover, his justification for the signification of democracy falls in the same end-oriented trap: he argues that the purpose of democracy is to create legitimacy or stability through predictability. In other words, Hamid justifies democracy based on what political scientists Jack Knight and James Johnson call a set of first-order functions of institutions.

In their book, *The Priority of Democracy*, Knight and Johnson (2011) distinguish between the first and second-order tasks of institutions. The first-order task of the institution refers to the function of an institution in how it addresses certain social, economic, or political challenges. On the contrary, the second-order task of an institution refers to a meta-level where the institutions manage and determine effective institutional arrangements. Knight and Johnson suggest that "benefits of democracy are derived from its second-order effects: the way in which democratic institutional arrangements

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1   I prefer to use West Asia and North Africa instead of the Middle East. While the term Middle East is popular in the West, it defines the region with the centrality of Europe. For Persian and Indian perspectives on this concept see (IDSA, 2018 p. 99; Bustani, 2021). Hamid's notion of the Middle East is also limited to Arabic-majority-speaking countries.

facilitate effective institutional choice" (Knight and Johnson, 2011 p. 20). The first-order function of an institution is to resolve the problem of collective action and generate short-term stability by creating predictability and legitimacy. The second-order function is how the process of effective and efficient institutional arrangement should be. Hamid does not articulate whether the concept of minimalist democracy seeks to address the first-order task or the second-order function of institutions. Contra to Hamid's approach, a democratic minimalist should consider democracy as a second-order task. Nonetheless, the Hamid does not engage with the existing body of literature on democracy from the collective action and institutionalist theories. This negligence results in an analytical error.

Moreover, Hamid takes it for granted that democracy is a mechanism for conflict resolution and, hence, short-term stability. In fact, there are cases such as the failure of republican Afghanistan (2001–2021) where democracy did not succeed in the test of being a mechanism for conflict resolution. If democracy by itself does not function as a conflict resolution mechanism, then other qualities and factors should be considered.

Potential limitations of "democratic minimalism"

The concept of democratic minimalism is not novel. Earlier theorists of democracy have talked about similar types of democracy. The Schumpeterian notion of democracy is considered a minimalist notion of democracy as it limits democracy to only a mechanism for aggregation of citizens' preferences.

A minimalist democracy presents at least theoretical and methodological errors. On the theoretical front, minimalist democracy does not capture non-electoral forms of political participation. Wedeen's (2008 p. 103–147) study of Yemen shows how qat chews function as miniature public spheres. Yemeni social interactions are frequently structured around the communal consumption of qāt, a stimulant leaf ingested daily during gatherings. These "qāt chews" function as a nexus for multifaceted discursive exchanges among participants of varying degrees of familiarity. Such gatherings facilitate a broad spectrum of dialogs, notably encompassing intensive deliberations on overtly political subjects. This social phenomenon serves as a significant conduit for public discourse and sociopolitical engagement within Yemeni society. For Wedeen, qat chews are a "site for the performance of citizenship for the critical self-assertion of citizens the existence of whom is made possible through these exercises of deliberation" (Wedeen, 2008 p. 120). These mini-public spheres facilitate political participation and deliberation beyond electoral contestation in authoritarian circumstances. A theoretical framework that does not account for discursively organized political action in the public sphere would render understanding democracy incomplete.

On the methodological front, minimalist democracy does not have utility beyond the large N and transhistorical studies. Stripping down democracy from all substantive qualities would only allow a binary or nominal notion of democracy in methodological terms. In other words, a nominal classification would not allow the possibility of understanding various forms and practices of democracy. For instance, Przeworski et al. argue that "alternative definitions of democracy give rise to almost identical classifications of the actual

observations" (Przeworski, 2009 p. 10). This is because the minimalist notion of democracy is exclusively generated from its methodology. Apart from electoral participation, democracy can be practiced through several channels that a minimalist democracy does not accommodate.

To distinguish democracy from liberalism, one does not need to take refuge in a minimalist notion of democracy. Instead, a substantive model of democracy also provides the possibility of doing this. Wedeen's analysis of Yemen qat chews public sphere highlights how one can conceptually and practically distinguish between liberalism and democracy. She states, "Qāt chews are the occasion for performing an explicitly democratic subjectivity—one that relishes deliberation—but it does not follow that such occasions necessarily produce explicitly liberal debates or forms of personhood" (Wedeen, 2008 p. 145). To do this, Wedeen suggests that political analysis should theorize "performative practices" rather than "the values to which people subscribe" (*ibid*: 145).

Similar to Wedeen's analysis of Yemen, I conclude in my paper on "Failed Democracy in Afghanistan (2001–2021): Lack of Deliberation and Pluralism" (Sadr, 2024), that the lack of space for an agonistic public sphere negatively impacted electoral participation which eventually ended in the failure of a Republic in Afghanistan. One cannot understand democratic practices in the authoritarian Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2001–2021) if one exclusively focuses on electoral mechanisms and neglects alternative practices such as that of the mini-publics.

Relativism and modernisation theory

Hamid is right that Americans should not bother about liberalism and its related values to enlightenment projects overseas. In other words, the U.S. should not export liberalism or put a liberal conditionality in its relations with WANA. However, his reasoning on the question of why is incorrect. He argues that WANA societies follow fundamentally opposing values to that of the US. As a result, the US negates the outcome of democracy if the winner is not desirable. To fix this policy error, Hamid erodes the conceptual integrity of democracy by reducing it to a mechanism of aggregation of preferences of individuals. The question that emerges here is: why do we have to redefine democracy to fix a US foreign policy problem? Cannot we address the pitfall of US policy in West Asia without ignoring the values attached to democracy?

This leads me to assert that Hamid's diagnosis of the puzzle is incorrect. The problem is not with the values often associated with democracy; rather, the problem is with the ideational basis of the US foreign policy in West Asia, namely modernization theory. The secularist modernizing autocratic states of the region are a byproduct of an approach that enforced an enlightenment model of modernization from above using the state apparatus. These autocratic states often received diplomatic endorsement, strategic partnership, financial assistance, and many more benefits from the US for the same policies (Hashemi, 2009).

Hamid's concept of "democratic minimalism" by itself infers a sort of relativism. As the concept is developed for and in the context of WANA, it indicates the region is unique compared to the rest of the world. In a sense, it demands a distinct methodological measurement and a particularistic policy treatment for the region as far as

democracy is concerned. It presents an exceptional solution to the question of democracy in the region. It provides a certain form of exemption for the region to be considered a democracy. This exemption is presently based on a culturalist analysis which precludes the region from the cultural elements of liberalism. This itself generates a sort of relativism.

In fact, democratic minimalism distinguishes political and cultural liberalism. This distinction is built across the line between progressiveness versus conservativeness. West Asia is pushed to the realm of conservatism so that the denial of certain elements of liberalism is justified.

A monolith notion of liberalism

Hamid adopts a universal notion of liberalism and takes the enlightenment notion of liberalism for granted. It is out of such a monolithic notion of liberalism that Hamid's decoupling of democracy and liberalism ends in a minimalist democracy. An intellectual critic of liberalism is incomplete if one does not acknowledge and engage with different strands of liberalism.

Alternative versions of liberalism include liberal pluralism (Galston, 2002; Daher, 2009) and modus vivendi liberalism (Gray, 2000). Both of these two versions of liberalism challenge the proposition that considers individual autonomy as the one and only core value of liberalism. William Galston distinguishes two types of liberalism: "one based on the core value of individual rational autonomy, the other on respect for legitimate difference—and argues for the diversity-based approach as offering a better chance for individuals and groups to live their lives in accordance with their distinctive conceptions of what gives meaning and value to life" (Galston, 2002 p. 10).

The problem with the US democracy promotion is not the fact that it promotes liberal values in West Asia; rather, the problem is that it promotes a narrow ideological version of liberalism based on an exclusive emphasis on individual autonomy. In fact, this is not just a pathology of US foreign policy. Liberalism has been in crisis in US domestic affairs as well. Political scientist Francis Fukuyama argues that US liberalism has been stretched both in its right and left spectrum of ideology. On the left, the concept of individual autonomy has broadened to the extent that it has led to identity politics; on the right, it has led to "neoliberalism" which has caused inequality and a gap between the rich and the poor (Fukuyama, 2022). The contention over what liberalism entails or not is to the extent some liberals do not accept the conceptualization of neoliberalism. While commonly misused as a negative term for capitalism in general, neoliberalism more accurately refers to a specific economic philosophy. This school of thought, closely linked to the University of Chicago and the Austrian School, is championed by economists such as Milton Friedman, Gary Becker, George Stigler, Ludwig von Mises, and Friedrich Hayek who criticized state intervention in economic affairs and advocated for free markets as the primary drivers of economic growth and resource allocation. One comprehensive definition of neoliberalism is given by the University of Chicago political scientist, Lisa Wedeen, who qualifies neoliberalism with four key factors: Economic stability measures that prioritize low inflation and minimal public debt, while moving away from Keynesian approaches to managing economic cycles; Opening up trade and reducing financial

regulations; Shifting publicly-owned companies and assets into private hands; and Scaling back social welfare programs and government support systems (Wedeen, 2008 p. 187). The New School political theorist, Nancy Fraser considers the latest version of capitalism as neoliberalism which succeeded state-managed capitalism of the post-war era. Issues previously seen as the domain of democratic decision-making are relegated to market forces. Central Banks, global financial institutions, and transnational governance structures such as WTO, NAFTA, and TRIPS who make the rules are not accountable to the public. This shift primarily serves the interests of financial institutions and large corporations. According to Fraser, this process has led to de-democratization (Fraser, 2022 p. 126–130).

To fix liberalism both in domestic and foreign affairs, the solution is not to de-couple liberalism and democracy. Instead, the solution is to craft a pluralistic conception of liberalism. As I argue in my book Negotiating Cultural Diversity, a theory of governance of diversity should encompass three elements: liberalism's conception of individual autonomy complemented by an appreciation of cultural diversity and the development of a capacity for intercultural dialog. The intercultural dialog should acknowledge the agonistic dimension of pluralism by underscoring the power dynamics in the public sphere. As mentioned in the previous section beyond electoral politics our theories should also consider the political action in the public sphere. While pluralism is not an exclusive feature of liberalism, democratic pluralism can not be built without a moderate notion of individual autonomy. A pluralist liberalism will endorse moderation that scholars such as Fukyama and Aurelian Craiutu have suggested. Moderation on the conception of individual autonomy to control identity politics and inequality.

A monolith notion of secularism

Similar to his monolith notion of liberalism, Hamid's notion of secularism is also monolithic. Hamid criticizes secularism as it distinguishes religion and politics and considers public religiosity as "a problem to be resolved" (Hamid, 2023 p. 60). This is not possible except with coercion, according to him. In WANA, he only highlights authoritarian secular regimes such as Egypt, Jordan, Algeria, and Saudi Arabia. Hamid also takes secularism as a defining benchmark for democracy-religion dynamics. Both of these assumptions are misleading. As political scientist Alfred Stepan discussed, there is a diverse set of secular regimes both in democratic and authoritarian states. Hence, secularism cannot be a good element of religion-democracy (Stepan, 2000 p. 43). While many political scientists make an empirical error in considering secularism as a necessary condition of democracy, Hamid creates a reverse fallacy by proposing the negation of secularism as a necessary condition for a minimalist democracy.

Like Hamid, Stepan considered democracy as a mechanism of conflict resolution. The difference is in how the two authors interpreted this process. For democracy to be a mechanism of conflict resolution, Stepan suggested the principle of "twin toleration," which means that both state and religion tolerate and respect each other. Stepan explains, "The minimal degree of toleration that democracy needs to receive or induce from religion and the minimal degree of toleration that religion (and civil society, more generally) needs to

receive or induce from the state for the polity to be democratic" (Stepan, 2011: p. 116).

Based on this, Stepan distinguished four versions of secularism: (1) separatist secularism where a full separation of state and religion is ensured, such as that of France (1905–1959): in this version, the state bans any form of religious practices and symbol not just in politics in general, but more specifically in the state (2) the established religion secularism, such as those of the Nordic countries, where the state has an official church; (3) the positive accommodation secularism where the state cooperates with churches, for example, in collecting church taxes, the state funds religious institutions, such as that of Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, and Germany; and (4) the "respect all, positive cooperation, principled distance" secularism of Nehruvian and Gandhian India, Senegal, and Indonesia. In this model, the state goes a bit further than the positive accommodation secularism wherein it allows multiple religions in the public sphere at the same time. In Europe, it's only Christianity that is accommodated. Muslims find it difficult to assert their identity as a group. In Indonesia, at least five religions including Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism are treated equally. A secularism that respects diversity and treats all religions equally is also called evenhanded secularism (Monsma and Soper, 2009).

Democratic minimalism embraces the public role of religion and the fact that religious parties should be allowed to participate in the democratic process. It assumes that allowing Islamist parties in elections would resolve the issues of diversity. But how can we somehow govern or manage pluralism if the religious-based parties in power neglect or violate diversity? Consider, for instance, certain decisions in Muslim-majority countries such as a ban on alcohol. The answer is evenhanded secularism which subscribes to the idea of equality, not to the idea of separation of religion and state.

Democratic minimalism also cannot respond to a case such as Pakistan where Islamist parties have been enjoying political participation (Nelson, 2017). However, the dilemma is that they also have parallel militant wings. If politics is the end of the war, does minimalist democracy lead us to this goal? The case of Pakistan's democracy does not give us the outcome that the theory of democratic minimalism desires. Instead, Stepan's principle of twin tolerance would require the state to take action against those religious-based parties that violate twin tolerance.

Hamid is correct that the autocratic states' promise of religious reform is shallow. He rightly asks that, since religion and politics are intertwined, how can an autocratic state that does not accommodate dissent tolerate religious reform? While this concern is valid, research also shows that liberalism followed religious reformation in the West. Without religious reformation, which justified tolerance and individual rights from a religious standpoint, liberalism would not have been possible. Political Scientist Nader Hashimi discusses how prominent liberal philosopher John Locke played a leading role in developing and defending tolerance albeit with reference to the teachings of Christianity. Locke's theology was "rooted in a dissenting religious exegesis" (Hashemi, 2009 p. 68).

Similar to the contemporary Muslim world, in the Middle Ages, Christianity was an intolerant society with continuous waves of religious wars, persecution of heretics and apostasy, and the brutal role of the Pope. Like many Muslim scholars who fled the Muslim world in fear of prosecution in the 21st century, Locke had to leave Britain in 1683 for the Netherlands. Following that, he wrote two crucial books: *A Letter Concerning Toleration* in 1685 and *Two Treatises of Government* in 1689.

In the earlier book, he distinguished between a true Christian and a true church from an intolerant one. He also advocated for religious pluralism—no church has the authority to declare the other heretical, since all churches are equal. He challenged the role of clerics saying that there is no evidence in the Bible to support their legitimacy. In the latter book, Locke engaged with Sir Robert Filmer, a traditionalist and royalist author. By refuting Filmer's account of traditional authority, Locke presented an account of individual liberty based on divine providence. According to Hashimi, "Filmer (unlike Locke) attempted to explicitly integrate into his political philosophy the writings of non-Christian thinkers such as Aristotle and Cicero, while Locke's authoritative references are decidedly and exclusively Christian—the Anglican theologian Richard Hooker and Jesus Christ" (Hashemi, 2009 p. 87).

Therefore, the path to an organic ideational and social transformation of the Muslim communities toward democracy and liberalism is rooted in a thorough religious reformation. Hamid's suspicion of UAE's model of interfaith summits or Morocco's Sufi Islam as a path toward liberty and pluralism could be as legitimate as these regimes are authoritarian (Hamid, 2023 p. 72). Nonetheless, a bottom-up religious reformation that can generate discursively organized political action in the public sphere will create an efficient endogenous momentum for liberalization in the Muslim world.

Hamid's thoughts on Islamic reformation remain conflicted. Initially, he debunks the idea of Islamic reformation altogether as he assumes it has already happened in the past (*Ibid*: 75), but later he suggests that Islamic reformation was never shaped against religious despotism. He argues, "Islam never experienced something resembling the Protestant Reformation—in part because it did not need one" (*Ibid*: 212). If the Islamist shift toward political pluralism in the post-Cold War was technical, without any ideological reappraisal as Hamid argues (*Ibid*: 217), then why is there no need for an Islamic reformation? In contrast to Hamid, I suggest that an Islamic reformation is a much-needed reform in the Muslim world to address under-development and three versions of Islamism: conservative Islamism, radical Islamism, and militant Islamism. I borrow this typology from Kamran Bokhari and Farid Senzai. While all these versions of Islamism do not accept democracy in principle, their reaction to it comes in different shades. The conservative Islamists exemplified by Egypt's Noor party and Gamaa al-Islamiyah do not accept pluralism but accept procedural democracy or minimalist democracy to use Hamid's term. The radical and militant Islamists categorically reject democracy and pluralism with two different approaches. The earlier one adopts religious and social activism such as that of Hizb Tahrir and the latter pursues a violent approach such as the Taliban, ISIS, and Al-Qaida (Bokhari and Senzai, 2013 p. 28–30).

Other political scientists such as Ahmet Kuru reiterate the need for reformation in Islam: "In order to solve contemporary problems of authoritarianism, patriarchy, and religious discrimination, Muslim countries need creative intellectuals (i.e., thinkers who criticize established perspectives and produce original alternatives)" (Kuru, 2019 p. 5).

A reductionist notion of plurality in the Muslim world

Hamid's account of pluralism in West Asia offers valuable insights, but there are nuances to consider. He argues, "ideological diversity of Arab societies is very much a modern condition…Before the advent of modernity, few if any Muslims questioned the idea of Islamic law. They may have disagreed vehemently with particular legal interpretations or how laws were implemented, but that the law had a divine source was not in question" (Hamid, 2023 p. 63). To Hamid pluralism is a modern phenomenon. Therefore he judges the premodern Muslim society based on a modern standard. This ends in presentism where two incommensurable eras are considered by the same measure. Conceptions of "the good" vary significantly across generations and historical periods, often proving incompatible. Evaluating past cultures through the lens of contemporary values is methodologically problematic, risking anachronistic judgments and misinterpretation of historical contexts (Sadr, 2020 p. 25). Having said that, it is important to note that premodern Sharia was pluralistic in nature. Wael Hallaq argues legal pluralism is intrinsic to the framework of Islamic jurisprudence, a characteristic that distinguishes it from the monolithic legal structures often associated with modern nation-states. This pluralistic nature is manifested in two key aspects: firstly, in its recognition and incorporation of local customs as significant factors in legal deliberations, and secondly, in its accommodation of diverse interpretations regarding identical factual scenarios as well as heterogeneous interests across space and time. Far from being a monolith, Sharia was diverse from Northern Africa to Khurasan in Central Asia (Hallaq, 2014). The underlying principle for the mentioned pluralist Sharia is the appreciation of the fact that the premodern Sharia-based political order is fundamentally incompatible with the modern territorialized state which adopted a uniform and codified legal framework.

Moreover, Hamid ignores the rich pluralism that existed in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic era in Central and West Asia. As Fredric Starr argues about the early age of Islam,

> Conversion proceeded very slowly. Indeed, Muslim theologians themselves acknowledged that many people of other faiths nominally adopted Islam but did not abandon their prior beliefs. The British classicist Peter Brown speaks of Islam resting "lightly, like a mist" over the highly diverse religious landscape. Only in the combative eleventh century did pluralism come to be seen as an evil and as a threat to the prevailing orthodoxy (Starr, 2013 p. 99).

Hamid takes the hegemony of Sharia for granted. The question one has to answer is how Sharia turned into a hegemonic system eschewing pluralism. This old pluralism of Central Asia was erased as conflict between Islam's different orthodox sects took its place. For instance, Fredric Starr argues, "It may not be a coincidence that the sharpest conflicts between Sunni and Shiite Muslims arose after the year 1,000, just as the old pluralism was everywhere beginning to fade" (Starr, 2013 p. 518).

Conclusion: balancing liberalism with pluralism

How can we settle politics in a deeply divided society through democracy or alternative models? Democratic minimalism is correct that ideological liberalism cannot resolve the issue of peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society of West Asia. However, it is

incorrect on the point that a minimalist democracy can accomplish the task. Liberalism presents a certain end state and wants us to agree on that. In most of the cases, those end states are value-driven which may be contentious for some others who would not subscribe to it. Liberalism does not have that capacity as it endorses a substantial pluralistic notion of a good life (Sadr, 2020). However, the theory of minimalist democracy cannot bind societies together either. It is thin enough to have the capacity to hold a complex pluralistic society together. What we need is a substantial idea of plurality. That's not a procedure like democracy–a set of agreed-upon rules. The idea of plurality is so substantial that citizens have to believe in it and the state should endorse it. Pluralism balances the dilemma between liberalism, democracy, and Islam. The proposed democratic pluralism is founded on four components. First, a conceptualization of democracy that extends beyond mere electoral participation to encompass active political action in the public sphere. Second, the importance of acknowledging cultural diversity and fostering intercultural dialog, while simultaneously recognizing the agonistic nature of pluralism. Third, a balanced approach to individual autonomy and identity politics, tempering these concepts to prevent their potential excesses. Fourth, the principle of twin tolerance as a benchmark for pluralist secularism, promoting mutual respect between secular and religious entities. These four pillars collectively form a framework that aims to address the complexities of modern diverse societies including the Muslim world, offering a nuanced approach to democratic governance in an increasingly pluralistic world.

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