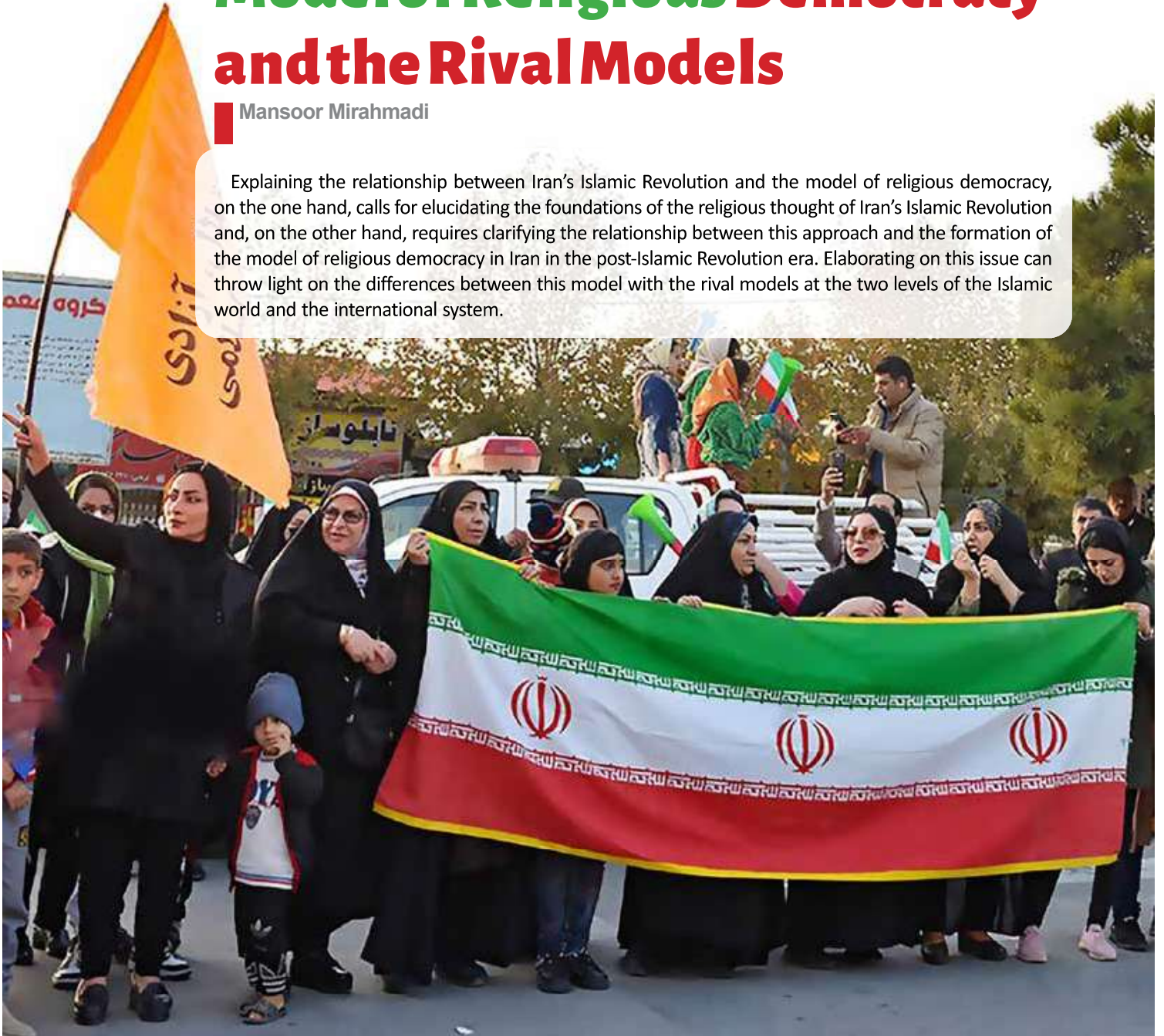# Iran's Islamic Revolution, A Model of Religious Democracy and the Rival Models

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Explaining the relationship between Iran's Islamic Revolution and the model of religious democracy, on the one hand, calls for elucidating the foundations of the religious thought of Iran's Islamic Revolution and, on the other hand, requires clarifying the relationship between this approach and the formation of the model of religious democracy in Iran in the post-Islamic Revolution era. Elaborating on this issue can throw light on the differences between this model with the rival models at the two levels of the Islamic world and the international system.

### 1. Islamic Revolution and the approach to religious modernity

The Islamic Revolution of Iran (1979) was the outcome of a particular approach to religion, which in comparison to the two traditional and modern types of religion, can be interpreted as religious modernity. Based on this approach, a direct reference to the religious texts and the application of the logical mind makes it possible to form a reasonable understanding of religious teachings that will make the real world adapt to the fixed religious laws. In this approach, religious tradition is a reconstruction in the context of the new world and the two sides of personal and social life are regulated by up to dated religious laws. In this approach, the religious tradition is reconstructed in the context of the new world, and the two spheres of individual and social life are regulated on the basis of revisited religious laws. Moreover, in this approach, Islam defines what is obligatory to observe in one's personal and socio-political life and has entrusted it to Muslims to define executive structures by keeping in mind time and space. Thus, the approach of religious modernity, which is the dominant approach in the Islamic Revolution thought, is significantly different from the two traditional and modernistic approaches. This approach is different from the traditional approach because in the latter religious understanding is not obtained through dynamic ijtihad and, as a result, the reconstruction of the past structures is not based on the requirements of the time. It is also different from the modernist approach because religious understanding is obtained by using the extra-textual methodology and epistemological measures and goes beyond dynamic ijtihad and results on ijtihad in principles.

### 2. Religious modernity and religious democracy

As the theoretical support for the Islamic Revolution of Iran, religious modernity brought about many fundamental changes in the lives of Iranians in the post-Islamic Revolution era, the most important of which in the political arena was the transition from monarchy to (religious) democracy. The Islamic revolution of Iran is considered an important milestone in the political life of Iran because it was able to expel the political and social relations from the monarchy rules for the first time and made people's vote the determinant of these relations. This governmental model is democratic because people's vote is the foundation of this political system and the basic decisions of the political system, and it is religious because it recognizes religious values and laws in the socio-political life of the country. In the religious democracy of the Islamic Iran people's participation in socio-political life is officially recognized as their right and people have the right to participate within the framework of religious principles, values, and laws.

### 3. Religious democracy and rival models

In general, rival models of religious democracy can be identified both in the Islamic world and the international system.

In the Islamic world, two prevalent models compete with religious democracy: the ideological/radical religious government model, and the secular government model. The ideological/radical religious government is a government that

recognizes the authority of religion in socio-political life but believes that religious teachings determine the content of political and social life and determine the mandatory structure that is valid for all times and all places. By adopting a textual and superficial approach, the proponents of this model try to introduce the caliphate model as the only legitimate model of government in all times and places. Although in practice, many Islamic countries have distanced themselves from the model of caliphate and instead, have adopted the model of Islamic monarchy, at the theoretical level this model has received the attention of many theorists, and emphasis has been placed on the revival and reconstruction of the model of caliphate. The practical example of this model in contemporary times can be seen in the two models of the Islamic Emirate (in Afghanistan) and the Islamic Caliphate (in ISIS).

The second rival model of religious democracy is the model of the secular government, which only recognizes the authority of religion in explaining socio-political values but does not refer to religious laws to regulate them. In other words, the authority of religion is accepted in explaining the values governing socio-political, but instead of religious laws, personal law, and human reason are recognized as the basis for regulating socio-political life.

By recognizing religion in defining values, this model departs from the model of the laic state but by bypassing the authority of religious laws and Islamic jurisprudence in adopting the required laws of the Islamic society, it distances itself from the religious state.

The secular government has no commitment to Sharia and fiqh (ju-risprudence) with regard to socio-political life and considers them to be related to the personal life of Muslims. This pattern can be observed in some Islamic countries in the contemporary era.

Unlike the two mentioned models, by adopting a modern approach and based on dynamic ijtihad, the religious democracy model of Iran recognizes the importance of Shari'a in both personal and social life. This model has adopted a popular structure in the form of the Islamic Republic and has, for more than four decades, tried to stabilize and expand the role of people in the two fields of system-making and legislation. In other words, in comparison with the two models of the ideological state and the secular state, the religious democracy model has been able to actualize a model of popular order in the decision-making system of the country within the framework of religious beliefs, values, and laws.

At the international level, too, the model of religious democracy competes more with liberalism, which is the dominant model in the international system. In the liberal democracy model, the liberalist ideology is officially recognized as the foundation of values and laws and, as a result, religion has no position in socio-political life. In this model, religion (mainly Christianity) is considered to be a personal affair and, therefore, secularism is accepted as the decisive factor in liberalism. In the contemporary era, especially since the 1970s, the model of liberal democracy has been introduced as the dominant model, and through the idea of globalization - and influenced by prevailing views - this model has spread worldwide. The wars created by the United States of America and its Western allies in the West Asian region under the slogan of democratization are some examples of the efforts on the part of Western countries to prevalent the liberal democracy model in the world. The model of religious democracy in Iran was expressed by such a strategic quality and challenged the idea of liberal democracy by which democracy cannot be linked with religion.

The model of religious democracy introduced by Iran has categorically challenged the idea of liberal democracy that democracy and religion cannot come together. In other words, according to this model just as democracy can be realized on the basis of liberalistic beliefs and values, it is also possible to form a model of democracy based on the religious beliefs and values of Islam. This model has undermined the monopoly claim of liberal democracy and has spread this message at the world level, specifically in the Islamic world, that by referring to religious texts, it is possible to create a popular model of a political system that can compete with liberal democracy. In addition to this, it has also challenged the relevance of liberal democracy in the Islamic world the majority of the citizens of which comprise Muslims who are committed to Islamic culture and values.

In conclusion, it must be said that the model of religious democracy in Iran has been able to introduce a popular and simultaneously religious model of the political system as a moderate (not radical and secular) and democratic (not monarchial and non-democratic) religious government in the world of Islam and the international system.