



Conceptual Transformation of "People" and "Democracy" in Contemporary Muslim Political Thought

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Abstract: Democracy in contemporary Muslim political thought is not a fixed concept but rather a contested and historical one that has been continuously redefined in the context of engagement with political modernity. Employing Reinhart Koselleck's framework of conceptual history (Begriffsgeschichte), this study analyzes the conceptual transformation of "people" (al-sha'b) and its relationship with democracy. Within this approach, political concepts are understood as temporal structures shaped within the tension between the "space of experience" (Erfahrungsraum) and the "horizon of expectation" (Erwartungshorizont). The central question examines how differences in historical experiences and expectations among Muslim thinkers have led to the formation of diverse interpretations of "people" and "democracy." The research employs a historical-conceptual analysis of the texts of contemporary Muslim thinkers. The findings reveal that the concept of "people" has evolved across four distinct levels – umma (religious community), millat (nation), legal-political subject, and social actor – while democracy has similarly undergone transformation across four levels: negation, containment, political right, and social existence. The study concludes that the contestation over democracy in the Islamic world is fundamentally a temporal and conceptual struggle concerning the possibility of political futurity.

Keywords: Conceptual History, Reinhart Koselleck, People, Democracy, Contemporary Islamic Political Thought.

Introduction

The concept of "people" as the primary subject of political power and "democracy" as one of the most significant models of governance constitute foundational concepts of modern political thought. However, the introduction of these two concepts into the contemporary Islamic world did not occur through a direct transmission from the Western intellectual tradition, but rather through a process of translation, reinterpretation, and adaptation to Islamic traditions and the historical experiences of Muslim societies. From the late nineteenth century, coinciding with the expansion of colonialism, the crisis of the caliphate, Ottoman reforms, and the formation of the modern state, Muslim thinkers were compelled to rethink the relationship between divine sovereignty, the will of the people, and the new political order (Hourani, 1983: 126).

As a result of this encounter, the concept of "people" in contemporary Muslim political thought acquired multiple meanings. In some approaches, "people" were defined in terms of "umma" (religious community); in others, they were recognized as "millat" (nation) possessing political sovereignty; and in certain contemporary interpretations, they came to be understood as citizens enjoying equal rights and political participation. Parallel to this transformation, democracy was reinterpreted—from a concept incompatible with divine sovereignty to a model compatible with consultation (shūrā), allegiance (bay'a), independent reasoning (ijtihād), and even a necessity for the realization of justice and governmental accountability (Esposito & Voll, 1996: 35).

A significant portion of the existing literature has categorized Muslim political thought based on ideological or jurisprudential tendencies—for instance, classifications distinguishing between Islamists, religious reformers, Muslim modernists, and secularists. While such typologies have been effective in identifying intellectual currents, they often neglect the historical transformation of political concepts and rarely address how changes in historical experiences and shifts in horizons of expectation have altered the meanings of concepts such as "people" and "democracy." Thus, a significant research gap

remains concerning the historical analysis of these concepts in contemporary Muslim political thought.

The framework of "conceptual history" (Begriffsgeschichte), developed by Reinhart Koselleck, offers an appropriate means to fill this gap. From Koselleck's perspective, political concepts are not merely instruments for describing reality but rather carry historical experiences and expectations of societies, and their meanings continuously transform within the context of social and political changes (Koselleck, 2004: 92). Therefore, concepts such as "people" and "democracy" should be studied as fields of conceptual contestation where Islamic tradition, the modern state, colonialism, nation-building, and contemporary political developments all simultaneously converge. Accordingly, the central problem of this article concerns how the transformation of the concepts of "people" and "democracy" in contemporary Muslim political thought can be explained, and what distinct patterns of understanding politics this transformation has generated.

The central research question thus asks: How can the conceptual transformation of "people" and "democracy" in contemporary Muslim political thought be explained? The subsidiary questions are: What are the semantic patterns of the concept of "people" in Muslim political thought? And how has democracy been reinterpreted within this intellectual tradition? The research hypothesis posits that the differing views of Muslim thinkers regarding "people" and "democracy" are not merely the result of jurisprudential or ideological differences, but rather stem from differences in historical experience and political horizons of expectation. From this perspective, employing the theoretical framework of conceptual history enables the development of a more coherent typology of contemporary Muslim political thought—one that, transcending conventional ideological classifications, is grounded in the historical transformation of the meanings of these two concepts.

1. Literature Review

Studies on the relationship between Islam and democracy can be categorized into three general groups. The first group comprises works examining the possibility or impossibility of compatibility between Islam and democracy. For instance, John L. Esposito and John Obert Voll (1996), in *Islam and Democracy*, explore the relationship between Islamic values and democratic institutions, while Abdelwahab El-Affendi (2003), in *The Elusive Reformation: Democracy and the Politics of Islam*, analyzes the obstacles to and capacities for democratic reform in Islamic societies.

The second category includes research examining the thought of contemporary Muslim thinkers regarding democracy and popular sovereignty. Michel Browsers (2006), in *Democracy and Civil Society in Arab Political Thought*, analyzes Arab thinkers' perspectives on popular sovereignty and civil society, while Mehran Kamrava (2008), in *Contemporary Muslim Thinkers and Islamic Politics*, examines the evolution of political thought among Muslim thinkers concerning governance, the people, and democracy.

The third category encompasses studies employing the conceptual history approach to examine the transformation of political concepts within their historical context. In this regard, Reinhart Koselleck (2004), in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, elaborates the theoretical framework of conceptual history and how political concepts transform within the context of historical experience. Despite the significance of this approach, it has rarely been employed for the simultaneous analysis of the transformation of the concepts of "people" and "democracy" in contemporary Muslim political thought. Thus, the primary gap in the existing literature is that most studies either focus on analyzing individual thinkers' thought or address the possibility of compatibility between Islam and democracy, while the historical transformation of the meanings of the concepts of "people" and "democracy"—and its role in the formation of various types of Muslim political thought—has received less attention. The present article, employing Koselleck's conceptual history framework, seeks to fill this gap and provide a conceptual typology of contemporary Muslim political thought.

2. Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

2.1. Theoretical Framework: Reinhart Koselleck's Conceptual History

The theoretical framework of this research is grounded in the approach of "conceptual history" (Begriffsgeschichte) developed by Reinhart Koselleck. In this approach, political concepts are not merely reflections of social realities but rather historical and contested phenomena whose meanings and functions transform within the context of social and political developments (Koselleck, 2004: 92). Koselleck argues that fundamental political concepts – such as people, freedom, sovereignty, and democracy – possess "temporal density" (Zeitschichtung), meaning they simultaneously carry past experiences and future expectations. Therefore, understanding these concepts without attention to the historical transformation of their meanings yields a reductionist picture of political thought (Koselleck, 2004: 73). Two key concepts within this framework are the "space of experience" (Erfahrungsraum) and the "horizon of expectation" (Erwartungshorizont). The space of experience refers to the accumulated historical experiences of a society, while the horizon of expectation denotes actors' conceptions of a desirable future. Political concepts are formed and transformed within the tension between these two domains (Koselleck, 2004: 270–275). In this research, the concepts of "people" and "democracy" are likewise treated as historical and contested concepts that, in contemporary Muslim political thought, have acquired different meanings due to encounters with colonialism, the modern state, religious reform, and social transformations. From this perspective, the differing views of Muslim thinkers regarding democracy are not merely normative or jurisprudential disagreements but reflect differences in their historical experiences and horizons of expectation.

2.2. Operational Model of the Theoretical Framework

Although conceptual history was originally formulated for analyzing the transformation of political concepts in European intellectual history, its methodological capacity is not confined to a particular

historical or geographical tradition. What matters in this approach is not the origin of concepts but rather how their meanings transform within the context of different historical experiences and horizons of expectation. From this perspective, the concepts of "people" and "democracy" in contemporary Muslim political thought can likewise be studied as "basic concepts" (*Grundbegriffe*) that have undergone repeated redefinitions in the process of encountering political modernity, colonialism, the nation-state, revolutions, and contemporary intellectual transformations. Consequently, the central concern of this research is not a normative evaluation of the correctness or incorrectness of these interpretations, but rather the explanation of the historical logic of their semantic transformation.

Accordingly, the present theoretical framework is operationalized as a three-stage analytical model. In the first stage, the concepts of "people" and "democracy" in the works of selected thinkers are extracted as the unit of analysis. In the second stage, each conceptual application is analyzed in light of the "space of experience" that shaped it—experiences such as colonialism, the collapse of the caliphate, the formation of the modern state, the Islamic Revolution, religious reform, or globalization. In the third stage, each thinker's "horizon of expectation" regarding the future of the political order is reconstructed to clarify how differences in historical experiences produced differing horizons of expectation and consequently redefined the concepts of people and democracy. The outcome of this process is a typology of discourses in Muslim political thought based on the logic of conceptual transformation, rather than merely on ideological or jurisprudential classifications.

In other words, the primary analytical variable of this research is the semantic transformation of political concepts—a variable examined through analysis of the relationship between the "space of experience," the "horizon of expectation," and the "conceptual configuration" of each thinker. In this model, the space of experience serves as the explanatory variable, the horizon of expectation as the mediating mechanism, and the meaning of the concepts of people and democracy as the analytical outcome. Thus, the Koselleckian framework in this research is not merely a theoretical basis for

describing concepts but becomes an operational model for analyzing, comparing, and typologizing contemporary Muslim political thought.

3. Research Method

This research employs a historical-conceptual method of analysis based on Koselleck's framework of conceptual history. The unit of analysis consists of the theoretical texts of contemporary Muslim thinkers, and the objective is to examine the semantic transformation of the two concepts of "people" and "democracy" within these texts. In the first step, the conceptual applications of these two terms in the works of selected thinkers are extracted. These applications are then analyzed in light of the historical, political, and social contexts of their formation, based on the two concepts of "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation." Finally, based on semantic similarities and differences, a typology of discourses in contemporary Muslim political thought is presented. The application of this method enables the study of conceptual transformation beyond normative judgments about the compatibility or incompatibility of Islam and democracy, and demonstrates how changes in historical contexts have led to the redefinition of the meanings and functions of the concepts of "people" and "democracy."

4. Conceptual Transformation of "People" in Contemporary Muslim Political Thought

4.1. Reconstruction of the Concept Based on the Space of Experience, Horizon of Expectation, and Historical Non-Simultaneity

Within Reinhart Koselleck's framework of conceptual history, political concepts are not merely instruments for describing reality but carry dense layers of historical experience and expectations oriented toward the future. From this perspective, the concept of "people" in contemporary Muslim political thought possesses multi-layered semantic density, wherein heterogeneous historical experiences and differing political expectations have simultaneously sedimented. Accordingly, the analysis of this concept in the present research is based on three axes: the space of experience, the horizon of

expectation, and the coexistence or conflict of different temporal layers within a single conceptual formation (Koselleck, 2004).

The concept of "people" in Muslim political thought has evolved not along a linear and evolutionary path but rather through a multi-temporal and non-simultaneous process. Conceptual configurations such as "umma" (religious community), "millat" (nation), and "citizens possessing political agency" simultaneously exist within the conceptual field of Muslim political thought. This non-simultaneous coexistence constitutes one of the primary sources of disagreement regarding the status of the people and their relationship with democracy. In other words, the contestation over the meaning of "people" is, at a deeper level, a contestation over the relationship between historical past and the desirable future of the political order, because each configuration of "people" relies on a specific historical experience and delineates a different horizon of politics.

Based on the conceptual history framework, the analysis of the concept of "people" in this research is organized not on the basis of conventional ideological, jurisprudential, or religious classifications, but on the historical transformation of meaning and its relationship with the two components of space of experience and horizon of expectation. Examination of the texts of contemporary Muslim thinkers reveals that although their understandings of the concept of people are diverse, this diversity can be categorized into several relatively coherent patterns of meaning-making. These patterns, rather than representing complete breaks from one another, reflect different layers of conceptual transformation that in many cases coexist simultaneously in contemporary Muslim political thought. Accordingly, four conceptual clusters are introduced below, each representing a specific relationship between historical experience, horizon of expectation, and the status of the people in the political order. These clusters are analytical types, and their boundaries are neither rigid nor exclusive. Thus, the thought of some thinkers may contain elements belonging to more than one cluster; nevertheless, the primary criterion for classification is the dominance of a specific semantic pattern in the configuration of the concept of "people."

4.1.1. First Cluster: The People as Religious Community (Umma)

With the predominance of the pre-modern space of experience and a return-oriented horizon of expectation, the concept of people in this cluster is fixed within the semantic horizon of "umma." The space of experience of thinkers such as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Sayyid Quṭb, Abū al-A'la Mawdūdī, and Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr is primarily characterized by the experience of the collapse of the political order of the Islamic world, colonialism, and the rupture of religious authority. This space of experience produces a concept of people in which the people lack independent political autonomy and whose status is defined in relation to the Shari'a. The horizon of expectation in this discourse is the horizon of return to a lost order. In Koselleck's terms, the horizon of expectation has not yet fully separated from the space of experience, and the future is understood as an extension of the past. Consequently, the people are regarded more as "subjects of politics" than as "agents of politics" (Koselleck, 2004: 280).

For instance, in Mawdūdī's theory of divine sovereignty (ḥākimiyya), the people are merely executors of the divine will and not an independent source of legitimacy (Mawdudi, 1960: 160). In al-Afghānī's thought, although signs of transition toward a new horizon appear, the revival of the umma as a politico-religious unity remains the central axis. His conceptual configuration can be characterized as: space of experience — the decline of the Islamic world and the dominance of colonialism; horizon of expectation — the revival of Islamic power through the awakening of the umma; configuration of the people — the awakening umma, not the nation possessing rights (Keddie, 1968: 34–49). Thus, this cluster can be understood as a stage in which the horizon of expectation is in the process of rupture but has not yet fully separated from traditional logic.

4.1.2. Second Cluster: The People as Source of Legitimacy and Oversight (Coexistence of Traditional Space of Experience and Modern Horizon of Expectation)

In this cluster, we encounter an incomplete state of conceptual transition. The space of experience of thinkers such as Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nā'inī, Ākhūnd Khurāsānī, Imam Khomeini, Shahīd Beheshti, Ayatollah Montazeri, Dāvūd Firḥī, and Manṣūr Mīr

Aḥmadi consists of the experience of the modern state, revolution, constitutional law, and the institutional order of power. This historical experience has made the complete exclusion of the people from the power equation impossible. Nevertheless, the horizon of expectation has not yet become fully modern. The political future is one in which the Shari‘a and the people exist in a symbiotic rather than substitutive relationship (Parry, 2023: 300). Consequently, the people are understood as sources of "legitimacy," "allegiance" (bay‘a), "oversight," and "control of power," but not as independent sources of sovereignty. From Koselleck's perspective, this situation represents a clear instance of "conceptual non-simultaneity" (Ungleichzeitigkeit), where modern vocabulary has entered but the conceptual logic remains within a pre-modern or semi-modern horizon (Koselleck, 2004: 30). For example, Nā‘inī regards the people as overseers of power rather than possessors of sovereignty (Nā‘inī, 1999: 114), while Beheshti considers the people, within the framework of religious values, as the source of the exercise of power (Beheshti, 2015: 63). Overall, this cluster represents a situation in which "people" have entered the language of politics but have not yet fully become modern political subjects.

4.1.3. Third Cluster: The People as Sovereign Agent and Rights-Bearer (Relative Rupture from Traditional Space of Experience and Open Horizon of Expectation)

In this cluster, the space of experience is fundamentally transformed. Thinkers such as ‘Abd al-Karīm Soroush, Mohsen Kadivar, Moḥammad Mojtahed Shabestari, Aḥmad Qābel, Faḡlur Raḡmān, and Rāshid al-Ghannūshī ground their analysis in the experience of political modernity, human rights, and the nation-state. The horizon of expectation here has broken away from the traditional space of experience and presupposes an open, elective, and people's political will-based future. The people are no longer a religious community but a nation possessing political rights (Koselleck, 2004: 100). In this sense, the people are considered not merely legitimacy-grantors but law-makers and sovereigns. For example, Kadivar conditions the legitimacy of government on the consent of the people (Kadivar, 1997: 189), while al-Ghannūshī reconciles democracy with the general will

(Ghannouchi, 2020: 430). This cluster represents a genuine but incomplete rupture from the preceding conceptual tradition, as certain ethical and religious elements are still preserved within the normative horizon.

4.1.4. Fourth Cluster: The People as Social Actors (Fluid Horizon of Expectation and Transition from State-Centrism)

In this cluster, the space of experience moves beyond the level of the state and formal institutions to the experience of social movements, civil resistance, everyday practices, and the public sphere. Politics is no longer confined to the structure of government or formal institutions but is also formed within a network of social, cultural, and civic actions (Bayat, 2010: 22). Thus, "people" are understood not merely as a nation or political rights-bearers but as a collection of social actors who, through everyday actions, transform power relations.

For instance, Asef Bayat demonstrates that political change in many Islamic societies is less the product of formal organizations than of "social nonmovements" and everyday citizen actions that gradually transform power structures (Bayat, 2010: 27). Mohammed Arkoun, criticizing the monopoly of the official interpretation of Islam, emphasizes the expansion of critical public space and the free participation of citizens in the reconstruction of Islamic thought, viewing the people as active actors in the production of meaning and social transformation (Arkoun, 2002: 85–89). Similarly, Naṣr Ḥamid Abū Zayd, through his hermeneutic approach to the Qur'an, understands religious understanding as the product of the continuous interaction between society and text, thereby highlighting the active role of society and citizens in the reproduction of religious knowledge (Abu Zayd, 2006: 115–118). Likewise, 'Abdullāhī Aḥmad al-Na'im, defending citizenship rights, freedom of conscience, and the rule of law, argues that the realization of Islamic values depends on the free participation of citizens in the public sphere, not on the exercise of authority by a religious state (An-Na'im, 2008: 18). Moreover, Khalil 'Abd al-Karīm, emphasizing the historicity of the political experience of early Islam, highlights the role of society and social transformations

in the formation of political institutions, distancing himself from state-centric interpretations of Islam (Abd al-Karim, 1990: 103).

In this cluster, the horizon of expectation is not the final establishment of a particular political order but rather the expansion of capacities for social agency, the strengthening of civil society, and the gradual transformation of power relations. The people are understood as plural, fluid, and networked subjects, and politics expands from the level of the state to the diverse spheres of social life.

4.1.5. Summary: The Non-Simultaneous Coexistence of Conceptual Layers

Koselleckian analysis demonstrates that the concept of "people" in contemporary Muslim political thought possesses a multi-layered and non-simultaneous structure. The clusters of umma, nation, and social actor coexist simultaneously in the conceptual field, and this coexistence is the primary source of theoretical tensions regarding democracy. Ultimately, it can be argued that the transformation of the concept of people is not a linear movement from tradition to modernity but the coexistence of multiple historical times within a single conceptual field. In final analysis, the contestation over "people" is a contestation over the "time of politics."

4.2. Discussion and Interpretation of Findings in Light of Conceptual History Theory

The application of Reinhart Koselleck's conceptual framework in this research is not merely a tool for classification or description of thinkers, but carries fundamental theoretical and methodological implications for understanding the problem of democracy in Muslim political thought. Within this framework, fundamental political concepts, including "democracy," are not fixed institutional models but historical, temporal, and contested concepts whose meanings and functions are formed within the relationship between the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation" and transformed in the context of historical developments (Koselleck, 2004: 85).

4.2.1. Democracy as a Temporal Problem, Not Merely Institutional or Normative

The findings of this research demonstrate that the disagreements among Muslim thinkers regarding democracy cannot be reduced to mere jurisprudential or ideological differences. At a deeper level, these disagreements express differences in the "temporality of political understanding"—that is, the relationship between the historical experience of Islam and the conception of the future of politics. In Koselleckian logic, modernity begins when the horizon of expectation separates from the space of experience and the future is understood as open and indeterminate (Koselleck, 2004: 255). The analysis of this article shows that a significant portion of Muslim political thought is situated in an intermediate state, where this rupture has either not been completed or has occurred asymmetrically. Consequently, democracy in this intellectual tradition appears in three primary forms:

- Return to the past order (democracy as threat or negated)
- Limited reform of tradition (democracy as instrument of power control)
- Relative rupture from tradition (democracy as political right)

This situation is consistent with Dāvūd Fīrḥī's analyses of political jurisprudence's encounter with the modern state, such that the introduction of new concepts into political jurisprudence literature, without transformation in epistemological and historical contexts, does not necessarily lead to their semantic transformation (Fīrḥī, 2012: 45–46). Accordingly, it can be argued that the primary issue of democracy in contemporary Muslim political thought is not the acceptance or rejection of an institutional model, but rather the difference in the perception of political time. The more the horizon of expectation distances itself from the traditional space of experience, the more the concept of democracy approaches being not merely an instrument for controlling power but a political right and a manifestation of popular sovereignty. Therefore, the disagreement among Muslim thinkers should be understood less as a jurisprudential or ideological dispute and more as a reflection of differences in their historical experiences and horizons of expectation. This finding demonstrates that Koselleck's theory of conceptual history offers a

suitable capacity for explaining the transformation of Muslim political thought beyond conventional ideological classifications.

4.2.2. Democracy as a "Concept in Motion" (Bewegungsbegriff)

Within Koselleck's conceptual apparatus, some political concepts possess a characteristic that makes them "concepts in motion" (Bewegungsbegriffe)—concepts that simultaneously carry past experience and future expectation (Koselleck, 2002: 320). Democracy in Muslim political thought precisely exhibits this condition. For instance, in the thought of Nā'īnī and Beheshtī, democracy is primarily understood as an instrument for containing power and preventing despotism (Nā'īnī, 1999; Beheshtī, 2015). In the works of Firhī and Mīr Aḥmadī, it becomes a mechanism for political participation within the framework of the Shari'a (Firhī, 2018; Mīr Aḥmadī, 2005). In the works of Kadivar, Mojtahed Shabestari, and Rāshid al-Ghannūshī, it approaches the principle of sovereignty and the political right of the people (Kadivar, 1997; Mojtahed Shabestari, 2000; Ghannouchi, 2020). This semantic diversity is not a sign of theoretical confusion but rather a natural consequence of the state of historical transition. In Koselleck's terms, during transitional periods, political concepts become "multi-temporal" (mehrschichtig) and semantic stability cannot be expected of them.

4.2.3. Conceptual Non-Simultaneity and the Possibility of Theoretical Misunderstanding

One of the principal achievements of this analysis is the formulation of the phenomenon of "conceptual non-simultaneity" in Muslim political thought. In this situation, modern terms such as "people," "law," and "democracy" have entered theoretical discourse, but their semantic burden still draws from the pre-modern space of experience (Koselleck, 2004: 168). This gap between word and meaning, from Koselleck's perspective, is one of the most important sources of theoretical misunderstanding in modern politics, because political concepts in transitional periods simultaneously carry different layers of historical experience and horizons of expectation, and thus lose their semantic stability (Koselleck, 2004: 44).

For example, in Nā'inī's thought, concepts such as law, parliament, public oversight, and limitation of power are redefined within the framework of the Shari'a and with the aim of curbing despotism (Nā'inī, 1999). From Fīrḥī's perspective, this demonstrates that modern political concepts in Nā'inī's thought, although employing modern vocabulary, are still interpreted within the horizon of traditional and jurisprudential legitimacy, and thus modern terms retain a significant portion of their prior conceptual content (Fīrḥī, 2012). Accordingly, a significant portion of existing disagreements about democracy in Muslim political thought stem not from differences in the definition of the concept but from differences in the temporal layers and historical experiences embedded within it. The greater the distance between the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation," the greater the possibility of differing interpretations of a single term. From this perspective, the contestation over democracy should be understood less as a merely normative or jurisprudential dispute and more as a conflict over the temporality of political concepts. This finding represents one of the most significant theoretical capacities of Koselleck's conceptual history approach for explaining contemporary Muslim political thought, as it demonstrates that conceptual disagreements are rooted in differences in historical experiences and horizons of expectation, not merely in differing ideological or jurisprudential interpretations.

4.2.4. Methodological Implication: Critique of Static Normative Approaches

From a methodological perspective, this research offers a critique of static and ahistorical approaches to Muslim political thought. Classifications such as "traditional/modern" or "democratic/non-democratic," due to their neglect of the historical transformation of concepts, are unable to explain the semantic complexities and temporal character of Muslim political thought. Such categorizations treat concepts as fixed and transhistorical, whereas from the perspective of conceptual history, the meaning and function of political concepts are always transformed through interaction with historical experiences and horizons of expectation (Koselleck, 2004: 199). In contrast, the

Koselleckian approach enables thinkers to be analyzed not based on the final conclusions of their theories but on the basis of their historical position, space of experience, and horizon of expectation. In this vein, Maṣṣūr Mīr Aḥmadī, in his examination of the relationship between Islam and democracy, emphasizes the necessity of attending to historical contexts, the transformation of the state institution, and the rethinking of political concepts in encountering modernity (Mīr Aḥmadī, 2005). Accordingly, it can be concluded that the methodological value of conceptual history theory lies in its capacity to move the study of Muslim political thought beyond simplistic binary and normative dichotomies, enabling its analysis within the context of historical transformations. From this perspective, the central question is not measuring the degree of compatibility or incompatibility of Islam with democracy, but rather explaining how the meanings of political concepts have been transformed through changes in spaces of experience and horizons of expectation. Consequently, the disagreements among Muslim thinkers should be understood less as the result of merely jurisprudential or ideological differences and more as the product of differences in the temporality of their historical experiences. This finding, while confirming the research hypothesis, demonstrates that Reinhart Koselleck's theoretical framework possesses significant capacity for re-examining the transformations of Muslim political thought and providing a historical and conceptual typology beyond conventional classifications.

4.2.5. Theoretical Implication: Redefining the Relationship between Islam and Democracy

In light of the findings of this research, the relationship between Islam and democracy can be explained neither as an inherent conflict nor as a complete and predetermined compatibility, but rather as a historical, dynamic, and open process that takes shape within the context of the transformation of political concepts. From this perspective, democracy in Muslim political thought can achieve conceptual stabilization only when the horizon of expectation distances itself from the logic of return, when the people are redefined as historical agents possessing

rights, and when modern concepts transition from the lexical level to the semantic level. This finding aligns with certain interpretations of Muslim modernists, including 'Abd al-Karīm Soroush, who considers the transformation of religious understanding necessary for rethinking the relationship between religion and politics, and Faḡlur Raḡmān, who emphasizes the reconstruction of Islamic thought in accordance with the needs of the time and the connection between Islamic values and the exigencies of the modern world (Soroush, 2000; Rahman, 1982).

Accordingly, Koselleckian analysis demonstrates that democracy in Muslim political thought is less an institutional or merely normative issue and more a historical and temporal concept whose meaning continuously transforms within the relationship between the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation" (Koselleck, 2004: 204). Therefore, the disagreement among Muslim thinkers should not be reduced to mere acceptance or rejection of democracy, but rather understood as reflecting differences in their historical experiences and horizons of expectation. Consequently, any analysis of the relationship between Islam and democracy that neglects the historical context of conceptual transformation will inevitably present a static and reductionist picture of Muslim political thought; whereas the conceptual history approach enables understanding of this relationship as a dynamic, multi-layered, and continuously redefining process.

Conclusion

This research was conducted with the aim of analyzing the conceptual transformation of "people" and its relationship with "democracy" in contemporary Muslim political thought, employing Reinhart Koselleck's theoretical framework of conceptual history. The central problem of the research concerned how differences in historical experiences and horizons of expectation among Muslim thinkers have led to the formation of diverse interpretations of the concepts of "people" and "democracy." The findings demonstrate that these differences cannot be reduced to mere jurisprudential, ideological, or normative disagreements; rather, a significant portion of them are

rooted in the temporality of political concepts and differences in the spaces of experience and horizons of expectation of the thinkers.

Examination of the texts of contemporary Muslim thinkers revealed that the concept of "people" has evolved not as a linear and evolutionary trajectory but within the framework of the coexistence of multiple temporal layers. Accordingly, four conceptual configurations can be identified—"umma" (religious community), "millat" (nation), "legal-political subject," and "social actor"—each representing a different relationship between historical experience, horizon of expectation, and the status of the people in the political order. Parallel to this transformation, the concept of democracy, corresponding to these conceptual configurations, has acquired different meanings—from negation and rejection to political participation, the right of popular sovereignty, and ultimately social agency. This semantic diversity demonstrates that political concepts in contemporary Muslim political thought possess a multi-temporal and dynamic structure, simultaneously drawing from different layers of historical experience.

The findings also confirm the main hypothesis of the article—that the differing views of Muslim thinkers regarding people and democracy are less the product of merely jurisprudential or ideological differences and more a reflection of differences in their spaces of experience and horizons of expectation. From this perspective, existing disagreements should be understood as the result of conceptual non-simultaneity and differences in the temporality of historical experiences, rather than merely theoretical or normative content conflicts.

From a theoretical perspective, this research has demonstrated that analysis of the relationship between Islam and democracy without attention to the historical transformation of concepts inevitably leads to reductionism. From a methodological perspective, the application of Koselleck's conceptual history framework enables moving beyond simplistic and static dichotomies such as "traditional/modern" or "democratic/non-democratic," and instead places the study of temporal layers of concepts and their historical contexts at the center of analysis.

The innovation of this research can be formulated at three levels. At the theoretical level, through the coherent application of Reinhart Koselleck's conceptual history framework, the article has made possible a re-reading of the relationship between Islam and democracy based on the historical transformation of concepts. At the analytical level, the presentation of a typology of thinkers based on the three components of "space of experience," "horizon of expectation," and "conceptual non-simultaneity" offers a perspective distinct from conventional ideological classifications. At the methodological level, by focusing on the temporality of political concepts, the research offers a historical and conceptual analysis of contemporary Muslim political thought that moves beyond static normative judgments.

The findings of this research also demonstrate that the conceptual history framework possesses significant capacity for the study of other fundamental concepts of Islamic political thought—including "sovereignty," "legitimacy," "law," and "umma"—and can be employed in future research for analyzing the transformation of these concepts, studying social movements in the Islamic world, and comparing the temporality of political concepts across different intellectual and religious traditions.

Ultimately, it can be concluded that the central issue in the relationship between Islam and democracy is not the "possibility or impossibility of compatibility" but rather "how political concepts have historically transformed within the Islamic tradition." From this perspective, democracy should be understood not as a fixed and predetermined institutional model but as a historical, dynamic, and continuously redefining concept whose meaning constantly changes in relation to the transformation of spaces of experience and horizons of expectation. Thus, as long as these horizons of expectation remain unchanged, concepts such as "people" and "democracy" will continue to exist in a multi-temporal and contested state, and their understanding will be impossible except through the historical study of conceptual transformation.

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