

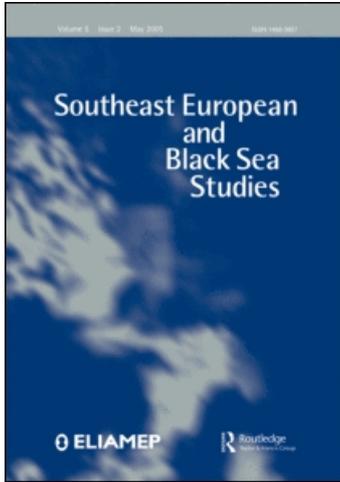
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### Secularism and state policies toward religion: the United States, France, and Turkey

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**Secularism and state policies toward religion: the United States, France, and Turkey**, by Ahmet Kuru, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, 313 pp., \$27.99 (paperback), \$88.99 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-521-74134-7

Until recently, the political science literature dealt with the question of secularism for the most part in the context of authoritarian regimes. But after the end of the cold war, state–religion relations have become a salient issue for democracies as well. Ahmet Kuru’s book makes a significant contribution to this ongoing debate by inquiring into the geneses of different forms of secularism through comparative historical analyses. Although Kuru draws from a variety of countries, his primary focus is on three cases: the USA, France, and Turkey.

Kuru explains the variation in state policies toward religion with ideological path dependence, and in the process, also innovates two concepts – or two secularisms with adjectives: assertive secularism and passive secularism. Assertive secularism assigns the state the duty to actively exclude religion from the social sphere, and to confine it to private domains, whereas passive secularism primarily involves state neutrality toward religion and nonreligion.

*Secularism and State Policies Toward Religion* is composed of seven chapters as well as introduction and conclusion sections. In the introductory section, Kuru touches upon the lack of studies in the political science literature on politics and religion, and attributes to two impediments the reason why political scientists have left this subfield mostly to legal scholars, historians, and philosophers. The first impediment, according to Kuru, was the secularization theory, which predicts that the modernization process would marginalize religion, and the second one was the normative claim that religion should not play a major role, if any, in a democratic polity.

After this brief introduction, Kuru moves on to Chapter 1, where he evaluates the existing literature, describes his puzzle, and lays out his theoretical framework. In the existing literature, Kuru identifies three different streams that offer insights in the analysis of politics and religion, and argues that none of them are able to successfully explain the variation in state policies toward religion. Summed up briefly, modernization theory holds that economic development leads to a decline in the power and influence of religion, but cannot explain the differences between countries with high levels of economic development; the civilizational approach emphasizes the essential differences between religions in terms of their compatibility with secularism, but disregards human agency; and in contrast, rational choice theory focuses primarily on the importance of strategic calculations, but largely ignores the role of actors’ ideas. As an alternative, Kuru offers ideology, and argues that there are ideological struggles among different state actors that primarily influence policy decisions. He further argues that, although ideologies and religions directly affect the formation of preferences, they are not monolithic, and each ideological conviction or religious belief is open to different interpretations.

With that approach, Kuru aims to balance rational choice and civilizational approaches, and to avoid by so doing some of their weaknesses – that is, he aims to balance the overemphasis of the civilizational approach on the role of ideas with human agency while moderating the overemphasis of the rational choice approach on strategic human behavior by accentuating the role of ideas. Focusing on the ideological camps within the state also helps Kuru challenge the statist analyses which assume that policy-makers are monolithic, and that they act solely with concerns about national interests.

But despite these qualities, Kuru's approach also brings with it the question of how the ideological camps form in the first place as well as why each camp forms the way it does. But the structure of the rest of the volume shows that Kuru is well aware of this question, since he examines each of the three cases in two separate chapters – one contemporary and one historical. The contemporary chapters examine the impact of ideological dominance on state policies. The historical chapters, however, take ideology as the dependent variable, and demonstrate how each ideological dominance under review came about in a long historical process.

In the historical chapters, Kuru carefully distances himself from historical determinism and, rather than regarding ideological dominance as historically predetermined, emphasizes the importance of 'critical junctures of institutional flux and deliberate political action' in bringing about change (37). He cites the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1922), for example, as one of such critical junctures that led to the rise of a particular political ideology in Turkey. In an effort to more accurately present the way he understands the theoretical relevance of ideology, Kuru also states that ideological dominance is never absolute, and acknowledges that some sort of a resistance always accompanies the dominant ideology (238).

The comparative analysis within the historical chapters of the volume demonstrates successfully the determinative value of the existence of an *ancien régime* in the establishment of an assertive secularist ideology. Another major dimension of creating and maintaining ideological dominance that the historical chapters manifest is the consistent competition between rivals for control over educational policies. Contemporary chapters take over where the historical chapters leave off (although they precede them in order), and analyze how, once dominant, these political ideologies translate into policy outcomes. At that point, Kuru's meaningful case selection helps him utilize both of Mill's methods. Kuru employs the method of difference for comparing the American and French cases, since they both belong to the same civilization and have a high level of economic development but differ in their dominant ideologies. In other words, controlling for the alternative explanations allows Kuru to attribute the inclusionary policies toward religion in the USA to the dominance of passive secularism, and the exclusionary ones in France to assertive secularism. France and Turkey, however, differ in all of their alternative explanations but political ideology. The method of similarity is thus able to explain the exclusionary policies of these two countries toward religion with the dominance of assertive secularism.

Page 36 of the volume has two tables that illustrate these causal relationships. In fact, throughout the book and its appendices, Kuru makes very cogent use of tables in condensing his arguments and summarizing the results. That, of course, is not to say that the text of the book is a bit complicated. On the contrary, the book gets its message across very clearly, reads very easily, and thus can be a very helpful source for wider audiences than the academia. More importantly, Kuru achieves that without oversimplifying the complexities of the question in a richly documented book that cites about 600 sources.

The weaknesses of the study are trivial. One weakness stems from the fact that the historical chapters sometimes seem to try to cover as much as possible for the long time periods under review. Such a concern leaves the reader with the impression of a fast-forwarded history lesson. The crash course on Turkish politics between 1980 and 1997 (228–31), which is written in that fashion, for example, would probably be hard to grasp for those who have not studied the country before; and for those who have, it

would not tell many things new or interesting. Also, the chapters on Turkey talk very little about the nature of Kemalism as an ideology. It is a missed opportunity for a book which emphasizes the determinative value of ideology not to have more deeply examined the influence of one of the rare occurrences of forced secularism as well as secularist socialization in a predominantly Muslim country.

In addition, it is true that, when explaining the reasons behind Turkey's comparatively harsher policies toward religion, Kuru points out more than once that France is a consolidated democracy while the Turkish regime is semiauthoritarian. But if Kuru spent more time on examining the ideological influence of a bureaucracy that limits the ability of the parliament on changing the existing policies, that would add to the study analytically. More importantly, the results of such an examination might also raise questions about the appropriateness of the use of Mill's method of similarity for the comparison of France and Turkey, if it is found that bureaucratic constraints limit the variation in the dependent variable in the Turkish case.

In all, despite its occasional shortcomings, *Secularism and State Policies Toward Religion* is a very valuable contribution to the debates on secularism, and deserves all the attention it has so far received. The book is likely to become an indispensable item in the must-read lists of all students of politics and religion – if that is not already the case.

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**Ethnopolitics in Bosnia and Herzegovina: state and society in crisis**, by Vedran Džihic, Baden-Baden, Nomos, 2009, 439 pp., €79 (paperback), ISBN 978-3-8329-4874-0

**[Ethnopolitik in Bosnien-Herzegowina: Staat und Gesellschaft in der Krise**, by Vedran Džihic, Baden-Baden, Nomos, 2009, 439 pp., €79 (paperback), ISBN 978-3-8329-4874-0]

Vedran Džihic has published a comprehensive oeuvre on ethnopolitics and ethnonationalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995. His analysis of the current political situation in Bosnia and the critical discussions on prevailing theoretical assumptions regarding the state, the nation, and the democratic transition contain interesting findings for those interested not only in Bosnia, but in the region as a whole. The author, who positions himself in the tradition of critical theory and poststructuralism, points to the fact that established theories are too limited to grasp the political and historical complexity of Bosnian ethnonationalism.

Ethnonationalism is the main political paradigm in Bosnia today. It has permeated the Bosnian society since the end of the recent war and has led to exclusivist ethnopolitics, which the political elites proclaim as the only possible political strategy to defend ethnic interests. Džihic carries out a thorough historical contextualization of ethnopolitics by 'demystifying' Bosnian history and by exposing current interpretations of history as ethnically affected and politicized. Thereby, the author demonstrates great sensitivity for historical sources, and how they are perceived. He refuses the idea of