

11-2014

## Democracy, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey

Renat Shaykhutdinov

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/id-journal>

 Part of the [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#), [International and Area Studies Commons](#), [International and Intercultural Communication Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), and the [Political Theory Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Shaykhutdinov, Renat (2014) "Democracy, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey," *International Dialogue*: Vol. 4, Article 9.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32873/uno.dc.ID.4.1.1085>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/id-journal/vol4/iss1/9>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the The Goldstein Center for Human Rights at DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Dialogue by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact [unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu](mailto:unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu).



# Review

## ***Democracy, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey***

Ahmet T. Kuru and Alfred Stepan, eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012. 216pp.

### Renat Shaykhutdinov<sup>\*</sup>

This book edited by Ahmet Kuru and Alfred Stepan provides an important contribution to the understanding of the nexus between democracy and democratization, religion and secularism in the context of Turkey, arguably the most stable Muslim-majority democracy in the greater Middle East. The volume features a select group of scholars and policy makers and is a product of two conferences held at Columbia University with the subsequent meetings and a thorough review and revision process. Among the contributors to the volume is Ergun Özbudun, the head of the academic commission for the new constitutional draft, whose chapters problematize the conflict between the pluralist nature of the Turkish society and monolithic state as well as the dynamics of the legal constitutional developments in the country. Prominent Ottomanists Karen Barkey and Şükrü Hanioglu from Columbia and Princeton Universities, respectively, examine the origins of the state-sanctioned multiculturalism in the Ottoman lands and its applicability to the current milieu of the Turkish Republic as well as the origins of Kemalism. Ümit Cizre, a leading specialist on the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF), in her essay argues that TAF is currently switching its emphasis from the top-down to a bottom-up tactical approach in order to secure its role in the society. In other words, TAF applies its efforts

---

\* **Renat Shaykhutdinov** is associate professor of political science and the Director of the Peace Studies Program at Florida Atlantic University. He came to Florida Atlantic University in 2007 from Texas A&M University where he received his Ph.D. He earned his B.A. degrees in Political Science and International Relations, and Sociology from the University of Bosphorus in Istanbul, Turkey. His areas of interest include the politics of nonviolence, ethnic and religious policies, power-sharing institutions, and the politics of post-communism. His publications appear in *Journal of Peace Research*, *Journal of Peace Education*, *Politics and Religion*, *Problems of Post-Communism*, *Journal of Ideology*, *International Journal of the Humanities*, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, *Canadian Slavonic Papers/Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*, and *European Journal of Economic and Political Studies*.

on mobilizing the civil society of the urban secular stratum of the Turkish population, which have enjoyed a privileged modern lifestyle, rather than relying on state institutions. Joost Lagendijk, formerly a Dutch Green Left member of the European Parliament, head of the Delegation of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee and currently a columnist for a Turkish daily, examines the progress of the Turkish accession to the European Union and, especially, the benefits and challenges that this process has faced during the rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). Stathis Kalyvas, a prominent political scientist and expert on Christian Democratic parties claims that the process of political Islamists' moderation in Turkey is not a unique experience. Rather, it is a continuation of a broader process of democratic inclusion of, and expansion toward, those factions of the society who initially oppose democratic ideals, which had started in Western Europe in the mid-1800s.

This book, overall, represents an important scholarly endeavor and can serve as a main reference point concerning the questions of Islam, democracy and secularism in Turkey and the recent developments in each issue area. Each chapter represents a stand-alone study contributing significant insights to each set of the relevant literatures undertaken by each separate author. The chapters provide rich details in regard to the historical background of Turkey as they pertain to a particular issue in addition to advancing the main conceptual and theoretical contributions to academic scholarship. This volume provides a quick access to some of the very distinct but crucial historical and current developments and theoretical and conceptual frames for understanding Turkey. Consequently, this book should contribute to continuing policy debates about the democratic changes and the subsequent challenges to the democratization process that Turkey underwent in the past decade. The book is elegantly written and reads well, with only a couple of typos that I was able to detect. The entire volume should be of interest not only for specialists both in academia and the policy world, but also accessible to a broader reader.

While it is difficult to do justice to each of the worthwhile chapters included in the volume in a brief review essay, it is noteworthy that the chapters are generally organized in a chronological manner, starting with the Ottoman management of diversity and the historical roots of Kemalism in the late-Ottoman period, and finishing with the debates on the new constitution, the EU accession of Turkey and moderation of Islamist parties. The selection of topics and issues has been designed well as they incorporate both

the traditional and newer issue areas. Consequently, my suggestions concerning any possible new edition of the book should be viewed as relatively minor compared to the over significance of the project.

If at all possible, the editors could expand the current list of topics presented in the volume. Specifically, the relationship between the economy, democracy, and Islam has direct relevance to the general theme of the volume and is likely to attract attention of scholars, policy makers, and the general public. Economic development has long been argued to be a close to necessary condition for democracy to take root in a particular context. Moreover, the relationship between Islam and economy raises interesting questions with broad implications. The Turkish experience under the first decade of AKP rule has generally been that of a relatively rapid economic growth, but also, more recently, the one of stagnation and economic uncertainty. An analysis of the triangle of economy, democracy, and religion in the Turkish context might be a fruitful exercise for any further edition of the book.

Similarly, the issue of women as it pertains both to democracy, religion, and secularism could be brought in as a separate chapter in the book. Further, the topics pertaining to Islam in the book have been primarily construed through a dichotomous relationship between *religion* and *state*. However, to my knowledge, little is known in academic circles about the *internal* variation *within* an amorphous catch-all monolith of “Turkish Islam,” including the patterns of interaction between various Islamic movements and forces. An analysis, which takes into consideration a distinction between political and spiritual Islam, or perhaps even a more complex 3-D Turkish Islam, and examines the tactics of cooperation, confrontation, and cooptation between Islamic groups within that broad umbrella construct might also prove to be an interesting chapter for any future expansion of the volume.

The two chapters, which I found most relevant to the question of religion and secularism, are those by Kuru and Stepan, and Kalyvas. Kuru and Stepan discuss secularism (*laïcité*) as an ideal type and continuum. The authors survey the extant typologies of secularism synthesizing them into a 2x2 matrix along the *passive secular/assertive secular* and *separationist/respect all, support all* dimensions. It is laudable that in the empirical part of the chapter the authors include an African case, Senegal, to the now more conventional France and Turkey. Senegal is deemed to occupy one end of the new continuum (*passive secular/respect all, support all*), while Turkey, the other

(*assertive secular/separationist*). France, while sharing with Turkey the same categorical cell (*assertive secular/separationist*), would, nevertheless, lie in between Senegal and Turkey. The authors offer the existence of an *ancien régime*, an alliance of clergy with outmoded political elites, as a parsimonious explanation for *assertive secular / separationist* state-religion relations in France and Turkey. Absence of an *ancien régime* in Senegal is responsible for a *passive secular/respect all, support all* regime in the country. The explanation for the distance between Turkey and France in secular assertiveness was less clear in my reading but is likely to rest on the top-down imposition of secularism in Turkey, as opposed to a bottom-up one in France. If my understanding of the chapter is accurate, the explanation for the difference between the three cases seems to be of a rather complex, multi-stage and interactive nature.

Kalyvas' work is similarly interesting as it links the recent Turkish experience to a more established and well-documented development of Christian Democracy in the "West." In a nutshell, the author argues that inclusion in the democratic process of movements, which are suspicious and critical of democracy, would eventually lead to their democratization. Even though the author does not make it explicit, this thesis directly relates to a new and developing literature on the inclusion-moderation hypothesis of Islamic/Islamic political movements. Moreover, it inspires questions regarding the conditions for moderation, which are pressing as far as Turkey and the greater Middle East and North African region are concerned. As Joost Legendijk points out in this volume, the democratizing momentum of AKP slowed down in 2005. Concerns over the backtracking on democratic reforms have been voiced recently by the EU as well. The practical question, then, is what is responsible for a lack of a complete and final democratic transformation of the post-Islamist AKP under the conditions of democratic inclusion and what can be done to thrust its democratic momentum forward?

The questions raised in this review should in no way be interpreted as diminishing the quality and importance of this work. On the contrary, this study is a welcome contribution to the questions of Islam, democracy, and secularism both generally and specifically for Turkey. This volume should be on the bookshelves of anyone interested in the nexus of these questions. It should also be in the syllabus of any serious course on the interaction of religion, political regime, and society in Turkey.