

of textbooks reveals how the Turkish military—long hailed as the stronghold of an exceptionally successful top-down secularization project—has contributed to the Islamization of political discourse through the injection of the “Turkish-Islamic Synthesis” into the school curricula.

AHMET T. KURU, *Secularism and State Policies toward Religion: The United States, France, and Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Pp. 334. \$85.00 cloth, \$27.99 paper.

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After decades of neglect in political science and international affairs, religion has recently come to the forefront of both political processes and analyses. Negotiating the boundaries between politics and religion has become a major challenge not only in the context of authoritarian states in the Middle East but also in Western democracies. Indeed, public Islam seems to test the limits of the self-confident secular democracies of Europe more forcefully than anywhere else. Ahmet Kuru’s book is a priceless contribution to the cutting-edge debate on state–religion interaction. The wonderful choice of case studies, which includes countries across three continents—the United States, France, and Turkey—gives the analysis a global scope.

Secularism and State Policies toward Religion is the best comparative book that has been published recently on contested state attitudes and policies toward religion. Its success is mainly due to its rigorous comparative method and clear analytical and theoretical thinking. Kuru disagrees with the bulk of previous scholarship that focuses on religion or religious movements as the determining factor of state policies of secularism. To the contrary, he argues that different ideological struggles have shaped policies of religion in Turkey, France, and the United States. Although he points out that the United States stands out in its inclusionary policies toward religion in comparison to exclusionary policies in France and Turkey, his nuanced analysis reveals ideological contestation and negotiation in each country.

The book identifies two main types of secularism: assertive and passive. Assertive secularism demands the state exclude religion from the public sphere, while passive secularism requires a more passive role from the state that allows for public religion. Kuru emphasizes that these two types of secularisms do not characterize individuals or groups but competing ideologies over the state’s role in “managing” religion. The book provides an impressive number of examples of this from all over the world, placing various states along a secular–religious spectrum. Kuru places the three secular states that form the focus of his study in the middle (pp. 24–35).

The book succeeds in incorporating an extremely nuanced understanding of each of the three cases without losing terminological clarity, analytical consistency, and theoretical depth. This balance that Kuru achieves between depth and rigorous comparison deserves praise and can be attributed to his sharp focus on the most controversial aspect of state policy on religion: religion in schools. Kuru’s analysis neatly integrates the burning debates on the ban of the headscarf in schools and universities and goes beyond this widely discussed topic into the realm of religious instruction in public and private schools, state funding of religious private schools, and organized prayers in public schools.

One of the main strengths of the book is its Tocquevillean approach to state formation, which Kuru presents as the independent variable that largely shapes different states’ attitudes to religion and faith-based lives in the public sphere. Although he argues that the marriage

between religion and the state during the ancient regimes in France and Turkey left a strong legacy of a hostile separation between religion and politics, he carefully avoids historical determinism. Although Kuru rightly views state building as a critical juncture in state–religion interaction, his analysis leaves enough space for the possibility of change if social actors put sufficient effort into political transformation.

Kuru’s recognition of the possibility of change is most evident in the way he links structural analysis and human agency, particularly the will to mobilize in order to change the nature of secularism. Various forms of cross-ideological alliances in each country provide a wonderful laboratory for comparative thinking. In the American context, for example, Kuru elaborates the alliances between evangelicals, conservative Catholics, and Jews, which shaped the nature of passive secularism in the United States. In France, he notes that the headscarf debate created “an unprecedented coalition between the Right and Left,” which was facilitated by their shared anti-immigrationism and Islamophobia (p. 128). Finally, in the Turkish context, he mentions the alliance between religious conservatives and “liberals” in opposing assertive secularism and defending passive secularism (p. 171). Here, Kuru understandably emphasizes the politics of conservative pious Muslims, who played a leading role in the defense of passive secularism. However, one cannot help noticing the minimal presence of nonreligious democrats in his analysis, who unlike many conservative Muslims in Turkey, defend religious freedom as one among many other freedoms, including for example gay and transsexual rights and liberal choices of lifestyle for single women. It must be noted that while Muslim conservatives defend passive secularism mainly *for their own good* (and not others), nonreligious democrats promote passive secularism for the sake of individual liberties and liberal democracy *for all*.

Kuru concludes by arguing that “state policies toward religion in France are less restrictive than those in Turkey, despite the fact that assertive secularism is dominant in both countries” (p. 134). He rightly attributes this to the difference between the consolidated democracy in France and the “semiauthoritarian” regime in Turkey. Notwithstanding the difference between these two countries in terms of stability and strength of democratic political institutions, the ways in which France and Turkey currently tackle the challenge of public religion, specifically public Islam, could be interpreted slightly differently. In the consolidated democracy of France, as Kuru confirms, the question of religion overlaps with anti-immigrationist Islamophobia and converges antidemocratic left and right. In contrast, in Turkey, a rapidly democratizing country, the debate on the question of religion seems to link pro-democratic forces of conservative right and liberal left. In this sense, contested religion–state relations in Turkey are indicative of a Muslim country’s struggle for democratization, whereas they seem to attest to one of the main failures of European democracies—the inability to accommodate ordinary Muslim immigrants.

Although the book is a must read for students of comparative politics, political sociology, and international relations, it is of particular value to those of us who appreciate the affinities between political theory and area/international studies.

ERVAND ABRAHAMIAN, *A History of Modern Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Pp. 264. \$72.00 cloth, \$24.99 paper.

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Despite the immense coverage of Iranian politics and culture in the American mass media, Iran remains a mystery not only in the public imagination but also more importantly in academic