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Review of Ahmet T. Kuru,

Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment: A Global and Historical Comparison, Cambridge University Press: New York, 2019; 303 pp.: ISBN 978110840976, \$34.99/£26.99

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The field of International Studies, in general, and International Relations, in particular, has been undergoing a process of substantive and methodological expansion and democratization. While it still may be seen as a mainly American discipline due to the influences of various paradigms, methodologies, and theories developed in the United States, International Relations has now come to encompass a broad range of approaches. The ongoing democratization and pluralization of the discipline allows one to talk about the emergence of the Global International Relations, which is set to give voice to underrepresented groups, ideas, and methods.

In his new volume, Ahmet Kuru focuses on Muslim-majority states, specifically asking why the Muslim world fell behind the West in terms of avoiding violence, democratization, and socioeconomic development. In examining these questions, the book builds on the extant work, which investigates the relation of Islam to political violence (Gleditsch and Rudolfson, 2016), authoritarianism (Fish, 2002), and underdevelopment (Kuran, 2018), contributing not only to the area study of the Middle East and North Africa but also to the substantive topics of conflict studies, democratization, and development economics.

The argument developed by Kuru defies the widely observed dichotomies in the field, such as essentialism vs post-colonialism. He constructs an alternative explanation based on the alliance between the ulema (the religious class in Muslim societies) and the state (political authorities), and elaborates how the ulema–state alliance sidelines the influence of the bourgeoisie and the intellectual class, leading gradually to the demise of the Muslim-majority areas vis-à-vis the West. Methodologically, Kuru employs comparative historical analysis, particularly path dependency, relying at times on descriptive statistics. That is refreshing to observe in political science research, the author’s home

discipline, where sophisticated econometric methodologies are seen as having higher prestige and greater impact. Let me elaborate on these points next.

Kuru's main intellectual concern lies in the empirical puzzle of the Muslim world lagging behind the West. In the ninth to twelfth centuries, in comparison with Western Europe, Muslims were more advanced in numerous areas, including the economy and intellectual production. However, in the subsequent periods this gradually began to change. Kuru examines this puzzle in two parts, dubbed concisely as *Present* and *History*. As a political scientist, however, Kuru does not adhere to a chronological order and instead begins his examination using *Present* as his point of departure. In *Present* section, he specifically focuses on some of the most pressing political and policy issues – violence, authoritarianism, and socioeconomic degradation. In the second section, *History*, Kuru provides a rich analysis of the historical transformations.

Kuru relies on class configurations in his analysis as the main driver for the change within the Muslim world. He extends his argument to both religious and secular states, which have coopted the ulema for tactical purposes initially. Over time, the ulema began receiving strategic benefits from this alliance, one of which relates to the legitimization of Islamic discourse in public life. The state has also benefited from the symbiotic relationship with the religious class. Examples of this ulema–state interactions include even the secularist Turkish governments, which ‘controlled mosques through a governmental agency, the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), founded in 1924’ (p. 42) and making imams state servants. Currently, the populist-Islamist government of Tayyip Erdogan is further using the Diyanet to propagate its views. Another example Kuru elaborates is the Arab Republic of Egypt, founded as a secular state but later witnessed a process of incremental Islamization of its legal system. In the 1960s, President Gamal Abdel Nasser increased the levels of financial and administrative supervision of Islamic institutions. From 1962 to 1994, the ratio of state-controlled mosques increased from one-fifth to three-fifths, while the number of mosques has similarly expanded from less than 20,000 to approximately 70,000.

While trying to document his main claim, Kuru is nevertheless also attentive to qualifying, mediating, and reinforcing factors. It is encouraging to see, for example, that Kuru engages the resource curse literature. While that prominent literature has developed in its own right, Kuru intertwines it in his work to bolster his main argument of class conflict and alliances.

Since the most widespread arguments explaining underdevelopment and authoritarianism in the Muslim-majority areas revolve around essentialism, on the one hand, and post-colonial approaches, on the other hand, Kuru's novelty lies in challenging them both simultaneously. Bringing to the fore the class-centered explanations and specifying the ulema–state alliance, he develops an argument that has never been offered before.

It is also noteworthy that Kuru coined some interesting terms in the course of his extensive work, such as ‘statistical Orientalism’ – sweeping inferences about Islamic societies based on simple statistical correlations and devoid of deep substantive analyses. As this concept can be easily overlooked in the large and rich picture offered by the book, I think it is important to emphasize its existence.

Two areas which the book could have examined deeper are persistence of the ulema–state alliance and the theory's application to peripheral Islamic areas. Specifically, first,

why has the ulema–state alliance persisted so long? Although this alliance has been briefly interrupted or somewhat diminished by the nationalist revolutions in Turkey, Iran, and the Arab world, it still persists. Second, how does the argument of the alliance apply to less central parts of the Muslim-majority areas: the steppes of northern and central Kazakhstan, parts of Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as West Africa and the Middle Volga (Idel-Ural)?

These points of constructive critique notwithstanding, Kuru narrates a cautionary tale. Using the Muslim world as the main focus of the analysis and the Western contexts as the counterfactual, Kuru's book has implications for those of us living in the global North. Violence, authoritarianism, and underdevelopment, in Kuru's view, are the product of the declining role, size, and influence of the intellectual elites in any given society. It is probably accurate to describe the educational sector as politically 'soft' in both non-Western and Western societies vis-à-vis coercive security apparatus and conservative movements. As such, intellectualism often becomes a convenient target for political attacks, religious bigotry, and economic cuts. Consequently, it may lead in the long run to the undesirable outcomes of collective hostility, tyranny, and poverty.

In short, Ahmet Kuru offers a comprehensive analysis of violence, authoritarianism, and socioeconomic underdevelopment in the setting of Muslim majority states and societies. His book develops a novel argument and provides a meticulous and well-presented empirical analysis to support it. It encompasses the themes of importance to scholars and practitioners of diverse disciplinary expertise in International Studies – from conflict studies, to democratization, international development, and history. This book has already quite deservedly received a prestigious Jervis-Schroeder Award of APSA's International History and Politics Section in 2020 and will be of interest not only to the scholars of Islamic studies but many others interested in political and socioeconomic problems at the global level.

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