


## Vineeta Yadav, *Religious Parties and the Politics of Civil Liberties*

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Güneş Murat Tezcür 

Department of Political Science, Arizona State University, Orlando, FL, USA

Email: [tezcur@asu.edu](mailto:tezcur@asu.edu)

The current state of affairs in the Middle East and broader Muslim world leaves little room for optimism and potential for progressive change. The short-lived euphoria generated by the Arab uprisings is long eclipsed by the brutality of civil wars and authoritarian backlash. The Islamist political movements that were perceived as the harbingers of reformism adopted illiberal positions, were crushed, or superseded by extremist forces. In this context, it may be tempting to develop a retrospective reading suggesting that this regressive change was inevitable.

Vineeta Yadav's *Religious Parties and the Politics of Civil Liberties* offers an alternative reading that highlights the contingencies characterizing the evolution of Islamist political parties' positions regarding civil liberties. Exhibiting an impressive command of vast amounts of literature, Yadav develops a meticulous theoretical argument. She argues that Islamist parties are more likely to take positions contrary to civil liberties, including freedoms of expression, religion, movement, and association and assembly, when they are more open to pressure from Islamist movements. Such a correlation of forces happens only under certain conditions. First, an inflation crisis makes it more likely for Islamist political parties that have a high concentration of legislative seats to allow for greater socioeconomic institutionalization of such movements at the national level. Next, civil liberties suffer when Islamists become ruling parties or join government as coalition partners in an environment of high socioeconomic institutionalization enjoyed by Islamist movements.

This theoretical argument has multiple original features. The core conceptual innovation is to treat Islamist organizations as special interest groups, rather than social movements, that engage in lobbying of political parties and have strong leverage over politicians when they achieve high levels of socioeconomic institutionalization involving control over educational, welfare, health, media, and professional organizations. While Islamist political parties, which are primarily vote-seeking entities, may have strong incentives to moderate their positions and flirt with liberalism, as Yadav compellingly documents, Islamist organizations tend to have a very rigid and restrictive positions on individual rights and harbor animosities against the set of freedoms associated with a liberal conception of sociopolitical order. When these organizations hold sway over parties, they push them in an illiberal direction. In Yadav's theoretical framework, the interaction between Islamist parties and organizations becomes central to understanding why and when Islamist parties become increasingly hostile to civil liberties. Hence, the participation of Islamists in governance at the national level endangers liberal democracy only when Islamist

organizations at the societal level command considerable influence and resources. Scholars who are familiar with the growing literature on Christian nationalism in the United States will find some intriguing parallels in Yadav's interpretation of Islamist politics.

The empirical framework of *Religious Parties and the Politics of Civil Liberties* combines large-N statistical analyses of factors shaping the extent of socioeconomic institutionalization of religious organizations and civil liberties in Muslim majority countries with case studies of Turkey and Pakistan. The quantitative methods are applied with great rigor and detail. The case studies involve a lively engagement with the literature on Turkish and Pakistani politics as well as original surveys of political elites in both countries conducted by professional survey firms. A sample of 226 politicians were interviewed in Turkey in 2017 and a sample of 154 politicians interviewed in Pakistan in 2018. The overall discussion provides evidence that the rising influence of Islamist organizations in both countries made Islamist parties (e.g. *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* -AKP in Turkey, and *Jamaat-e Islami*—JI and *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazlur*—JUI-F in Pakistan) increasingly illiberal.

Yadav develops a solid theoretical argument and presents multiple pieces of evidence in support of this argument. There are also alternative explanations to make sense the decline of civil liberties under Islamist governance. More specifically, the trajectory of civil liberties in Turkey under the AKP rule exhibits significant zigzags rather than a linear decline since 2002. In fact, the earlier years of the AKP rule, at least until 2011, were characterized by an unprecedented environment of public debate about political taboos, ranging from the Armenian genocide to the Kurdish question, and a flourishing of civil society activism, ranging from feminist and LGBTQ movements to environmental groups. The diminishing prospects of Turkey's EU membership, the AKP alliance with the ultranationalists starting in 2015, and the failed coup of 2016 brought an end to this liberal era in contemporary Turkey. Moreover, the growing socioeconomic clout of Islamist organizations in Turkey has been a product of the AKP hegemony. The military intervention of February 1998, which preceded the coming of the AKP, was a major blow to all these organizations. In summary, a fuller account of the decline of civil liberties as well as political freedoms in the contemporary Muslim world needs to encompass the international setting as well as the role of other influential political actors (e.g., the military as well as the nationalist forces in Turkey). There could be multiple paths to the same political outcome, i.e., equifinality, and certain outcomes, e.g., the decline of civil liberties, are often overdetermined.


Methodologically, it will be most valuable to conduct in-depth interviews with Islamist politicians to understand their relations with Islamist organizations and incentive structures in the face of pressures and demands they are facing from different constituencies. While surveys conducted by firms with these individuals are still valuable, in-depth interviews conducted by the author will be more effective in fleshing out the causal mechanisms characterizing the interaction between Islamist political parties and organizations. Moreover, interviews with leaders of prominent Islamist organizations will also generate insights about their expectations from Islamist politicians and their ability to get these expectations fulfilled.

In summary, *Religious Parties and the Politics of Civil Liberties* is an erudite work of scholarship that advances the literature in terms of conceptual innovation, theoretical sophistication, and empirical rigor. Its focus on political economy and special interest mobilization enriches our understanding of the fate of civil liberties in the contemporary Muslim world.

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## Sacred Foundations: The Religious and Medieval Roots of the European State

By Anna M. Grzymała-Busse. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2023. 256 pp. \$99.95 hardcover, \$29.95 paperback

Jonathan Stavnskær Doucette 

Department of Politics and Society, Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark  
Email: [jostdo@dps.aau.dk](mailto:jostdo@dps.aau.dk)

Anna M. Grzymała-Busse's impressive new book convincingly places the Catholic Church at the center of pre-modern Europe's divergent road to state formation, in two ways. First, the Church pioneered administrative techniques and practices that spread to and transformed Europe's secular states. Second, it deliberately fostered a competitive interstate system that fueled the incessant warfare singled out as key by other accounts of Europe's development.

According to Grzymała-Busse, the Church contributed to administrative and political development in several ways. It introduced new institutional models for taxation, petitions, courts, and parliaments that were emulated by European lay rulers. Clerical scholars were also essential in developing and spreading the use of Roman and canon law. Furthermore, the increased need for legal expertise fueled the expansion of educational opportunities, in the form of medieval universities. Without the Catholic Church the templates for administrative and political apparatus of European states would have been much more limited. The consequence would have been less centralized and effective tax collection, lower levels of representation, a higher frequency of feuds and use of blood money to settle disputes, and lower levels of human capital formation. Ironically enough, these state capacities later allowed secular states to make the Church subservient to state power.

The Catholic Church also played a more direct role in European state formation. The machinations of successive medieval popes fostered the geopolitical fragmentation of Europe as popes sought to free the Church from the clutches of secular rulers. Contrary to existing analyses, Grzymała-Busse thus finds that papal-led conflict is correlated with increased territorial fragmentation and urban self-government during the medieval period, while secular conflict is positively related to political