

AHMET T. KURU

Islam,  
Authoritarianism,  
and Underdevelopment



A GLOBAL AND  
HISTORICAL COMPARISON





## Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment

Why do Muslim-majority countries exhibit high levels of authoritarianism and low levels of socioeconomic development in comparison to world averages? Ahmet T. Kuru criticizes explanations which point to Islam as the cause of this disparity, because Muslims were philosophically and socioeconomically more developed than Western Europeans between the ninth and twelfth centuries. Nor was Western colonialism the cause: Muslims had already suffered political and socioeconomic problems when colonization began. Kuru argues that Muslims had influential thinkers and merchants in their early history, when religious orthodoxy and military rule were prevalent in Europe. However, in the eleventh century, an alliance between orthodox Islamic scholars (the ulema) and military states began to emerge. This alliance gradually hindered intellectual and economic creativity by marginalizing intellectual and bourgeois classes in the Muslim world. This important study links its historical explanation to contemporary politics by showing that, to this day, the ulema–state alliance still prevents creativity and competition in Muslim countries.

Ahmet T. Kuru is Professor of Political Science and Director of the Center for Islamic and Arabic Studies at San Diego State University. He is the author of award-winning *Secularism and State Policies toward Religion: The United States, France, and Turkey* (Cambridge 2009) and co-editor (with Alfred Stepan) of *Democracy, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey* (2012). His works have been translated into Arabic, Chinese, French, and Turkish.



# Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment

*A Global and Historical Comparison*

AHMET T. KURU

*San Diego State University*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

# CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108419093](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108419093)

DOI: [10.1017/9781108296892](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108296892)

© Ahmet T. Kuru 2019

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2019

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ International Ltd. Padstow Cornwall

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

NAMES: Kuru, Ahmet T., author.

TITLE: Islam, authoritarianism, and underdevelopment : a global and historical comparison / Ahmet T. Kuru.

DESCRIPTION: New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2019. |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2019004815 | ISBN 9781108419093 (hardback) |

ISBN 9781108409476 (paperback)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Islamic countries—Civilization. | Islamic countries—Economic conditions. | Islamic civilization—Economic aspects. | East and West.

CLASSIFICATION: LCC DS35.62 .K87 2019 | DDC 909/.09767—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019004815>

ISBN 978-1-108-41909-3 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-108-40947-6 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

To Uğur (1935–2004), who I wish could have read it, and  
Yusuf and Yunus Ali, who I hope will read it one day.



# Contents

<i>List of Maps</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>List of Tables</i>	xi
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
Introduction	I
PART I PRESENT	
1 Violence and Peace	15
2 Authoritarianism and Democracy	32
3 Socioeconomic Underdevelopment and Development	56
PART II HISTORY	
4 Progress: Scholars and Merchants (Seventh to Eleventh Centuries)	69
5 Crisis: The Invaders (Twelfth to Fourteenth Centuries)	119
6 Power: Three Muslim Empires (Fifteenth to Seventeenth Centuries)	165
7 Collapse: Western Colonialism and Muslim Reformists (Eighteenth to Nineteenth Centuries)	205
Conclusion	227
<i>Bibliography</i>	237
<i>Index</i>	293



## Maps

1	Forty-Nine Muslim-Majority Countries (2018)	<i>page</i> 14
2	The Muslim World (c. 1000)	68
3	The Muslim World (c. 1300)	118
4	The Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires (c. 1600)	164
5	The European Colonization of the Muslim World (c. 1914)	204



## Tables

I.1 Muslim-Majority Countries and the World (around 2010)	<i>page 2</i>
2.1 Secularism and Sharia in Forty-Nine Muslim Countries’ Constitutions	39
2.2 Rents, Taxes, and Rentier States (around 2010)	50
5.1 Occupational Terms in Industrial and Public Services	155
C.1 Comparative Historical Development: Muslims and Western Europeans	228



## Preface

As well as I can remember, I was having breakfast with my parents in Iskenderun (Alexandretta), on Turkey's Mediterranean coast, on a hot day in the summer of 1989. My father seemed upset, and when I asked why, my mother replied that he had had a challenging debate the night before. My father then explained to me how a secularist Turkish army general we had hosted for dinner had broached the issue of Muslim backwardness around midnight, after I had gone to sleep. The general argued that it was only Protestant nations who truly contributed to modern civilization, while Muslim nations were mere consumers of it. My father, provincial chairman of then Prime Minister Turgut Özal's right-wing party, defended Muslims' importance in world history by listing their early contributions to mathematics and other fields. The polarized discussion had left my father frustrated. Intrigued by the debate, I read a book in my father's library, the Turkish translation of Walther Kiaulehn's *The Iron Angels: Birth, History and Power of the Machines from Antiquity to the Time of Goethe*. I immediately told my father that by reading that book I came to understand how Western Europeans surpassed Muslims in technology. He smiled at me in a compassionate way and said, "You should read at least ten to fifteen more books to say that." This is how I began and have continued to read on the subject of the present book, and why it is dedicated to my father, Uğur Kuru.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am thankful to my teachers, colleagues, and friends for their valuable contributions. The late Bernard Weiss taught me Islamic political thought when I was a graduate student about two decades ago. The late Alfred Stepan, Robert Hefner, Reşat Kasaba, Joel Migdal, and Daniel Philpott inspired and encouraged my comparative work on religion–state relations. I have had rewarding intellectual engagements with Gökhan Bacık, Özgür Koca, and Fevzi Bilgin

about Islam and politics. Mikhail Alexseev, Ronnee Schreiber, Hisham Foad, and Ranin Kazemi were among my numerous critically engaging colleagues at San Diego State University (SDSU). Several SDSU fellowships, including the UGP and Hostler grants, supported my research. I am grateful to the SDSU librarians, particularly Edward DiBella and Joan Goodwin, for their assistance with my research.

I thank Cambridge University Press's editor Robert Dreesen and content manager Robert Judkins for their patience and professionalism, and the two anonymous referees for their helpful recommendations. I owe thanks to several colleagues for their helpful comments and criticisms on earlier drafts of various chapters, including Aaron Glasserman, Maya Shatzmiller, Timur Kuran, Khaled Abou El Fadl, Michael Cook, Frederick Starr, Daniel Chirot, Randall Collins, Jan Luiten van Zanden, Louise Marlow, Hasan Kayalı, Nader Hashemi, Şürü Hanioglu, Stephen Dale, Charles Kurzman, Ziauddin Sardar, Burak Eskici, Kristin Fabbe, Kadir Yıldırım, Peter Adamson, Yüksel Sezgin, Etga Uğur, Anas Malik, Rıza Yıldırım, Renat Shaykhutdinov, Mehdi Aminrazavi, Serhan Tanrıverdi, and Naser Ghobadzadeh. I appreciate the hospitality of several friends during my research in Turkey, Qatar, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, and Kazakhstan in various periods between 2010 and 2013.

I am blessed with the unconditional love and support of my mother Çiçek Kuru, brother Mehmet, and sisters Mine and Lale. My wife Zeynep has always been a source of love, inspiration, and joy. Our sons Yusuf and Yunus Ali have already begun asking comparative questions about the West and the Muslim world – two inextricable parts of their life. They will probably continue to ask many of the questions explored in this book; that is why it is dedicated to them too.

#### METHODOLOGY, THEORY, AND NORMATIVE CONCERNS

This book employs comparative historical methods while comparing certain periods of Islamic history with each other as well with particular periods of Western European history.<sup>1</sup> One method it uses is “process tracing,” which traces the causes of change by dividing a historical process into smaller and analytically comparable periods.<sup>2</sup> The book also uses the methodological tool of “path dependence”<sup>3</sup> to examine how ideational and material conditions in particular historical periods, especially “critical junctures,”<sup>4</sup> shape subsequent conditions by creating a path dependence. For example, in order to examine currently low levels of literacy in Muslim societies, the book traces the historical origins of this problem to these societies' three-century-long delay in establishing printing presses. Muslim societies did not take advantage of the printing

<sup>1</sup> See Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003; Sartori 1970; Collier 1991.

<sup>2</sup> George and Bennett 2005, 205–32.

<sup>3</sup> North 1990, esp. 93–4, 112; Mahoney 2001, esp. 4–11; Pierson 2000; Thelen 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Capoccia and Kelemen 2007; Kuru 2009, esp. 27–8; Lerner 2014.

technology during and even after the critical juncture of the mid-fifteenth century, when first presses were established in Western Europe. This historical experience created a path-dependent literacy gap between Muslim and Western European societies.

There are two main theoretical approaches in the literature on the problems of violence, authoritarianism, and underdevelopment in Muslim countries. The first one is the essentialist approach, which points to Islam as the main source of Muslims' current problems. Several critics of Islam in the West as well as in Muslim countries have adopted various versions of this approach. They define certain "essential" characteristics of Islamic texts or history and then single out these alleged essentials as causes of the problems. The second one is the post-colonial or anti-colonial approach, which is more international in its analysis. It stresses Western colonization of Muslim countries and ongoing Western exploitation of their resources as reasons for Muslim societies' contemporary problems. Many ideological groups in Muslim countries, from Islamists to secularists, have shared this anti-Western perspective.<sup>5</sup>

This book takes issue with both of these approaches. It criticizes essentialism by documenting that between the eighth and twelfth centuries Muslim societies exhibited great philosophical and economic achievements, which indicates Islam's compatibility with progress.<sup>6</sup> The book also criticizes the anti-colonial approach by emphasizing that in the mid-nineteenth century, when the pervasive colonization of Muslim lands by Western powers began, Muslims had already suffered multiple political and socioeconomic crises.

My theoretical approach focuses on the relations between religious, political, intellectual, and economic classes. In both the Muslim world and Western Europe, these class relations have resulted in societies' success or failure in the intellectual and socioeconomic spheres. Early Muslims' intellectual and economic achievements were led by independent intellectual and bourgeois classes. Starting with the eleventh century, however, class relations changed in the Muslim world; the ulema–state alliance emerged and it sidelined intellectuals and the bourgeoisie.

My theoretical approach emphasizes the connections between ideas and material conditions. Historically, the ulema–state alliance was based on some Sasanian-inspired and quasi-Islamic ideas, as well as certain material conditions, including the militarized land revenues and state control over commerce. The

<sup>5</sup> In the words of Timur Kuran (2011, 302), the Middle East "region as a whole has not yet come to terms with the reasons why it turned into an economic laggard. The idea that outsiders are somehow responsible for the Middle East's underdevelopment resonates with much of the population, including secularists who consider Islamic law backward and obsolete."

<sup>6</sup> Referring to this early period, Fernand Braudel (1993, 73) writes, "For four or five centuries, Islam was the most brilliant civilization." Braudel (1982, 559) gives credit to Islam for early Muslims' economic development: "Western civilization did not benefit as Islam did from the bonus of a benevolent religion."

links between dominant ideas and material conditions are also visible today; Islamist ideology and rentierism (particularly based on oil rents) are both critical to understanding various authoritarian regimes in the Muslim world.

It is necessary to make some generalizations about Muslim countries in order to find solutions for their common problems. Initially helpful post-structuralist, post-colonial critiques of Orientalist stereotypes<sup>7</sup> have been exaggerated and used by apologists to obscure Muslims' cultural and ideological problems; this has prevented many scholars from critically analyzing Muslim societies. On the one hand, this book criticizes simplistic over-generalizations, especially what I call "statistical Orientalism," which draws sweeping conclusions about Muslims based on mere numerical correlations without any in-depth analysis. On the other hand, the book tries to conduct a comparative and critical analysis of Muslim countries.

In some of my presentations of this book project, critics have claimed that democracy and development were façades for Western imperialism, and that my analysis would therefore serve the Western agenda in Muslim countries. I have had two responses to this challenge. First, I wish Western policy-makers had a consistent policy of promoting democracy and development in Muslim countries, which is generally not the case. Second, surveys show that the overwhelming majority of the people in Muslim societies favor democracy as the best form of government.<sup>8</sup> Most people in Muslim countries see violence, authoritarianism, and underdevelopment as problems; this book is not imposing a Western perspective upon them.

#### SPELLING, NAMES, AND TRANSLATIONS

This is primarily a book of political science, not history. It analyzes contemporary problems and explores history to understand their origins. That is why it begins with chapters on contemporary issues and then moves to historical chapters.<sup>9</sup> Dates throughout the text, including quotations, are given with reference to the Common Era. In order to reach a broader audience, I use Arabic names and words with their forms in English without using diacritical marks (e.g., sharia, instead of *shari'a*). I italicize words rarely, only if the word is not used in English (e.g., *bay'a*). I use diacritical marks for 'ayn (‘) and for hamza (ء) only in italicized words, in direct quotations, and in the [Bibliography](#). Referring to Islamic scholars, I write "ulema," instead of "ulama," because the former better indicates the proper Arabic pronunciation without the diacritical marks.

For Arabic names, I generally do not use the definite article "al." In Ottoman words and names I use the letter "k" instead of "q," the modern Turkish usage.

<sup>7</sup> Said 1979. See also Asad 2003, esp. ch. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Pew Research Center 2013, 32; Fish 2011, 245; Inglehart and Norris 2003, 64.

<sup>9</sup> I used the same chapter order, contemporary before historical, in my previous book, Kuru 2009.

For pre-modern persons, I use the most well-known version of their names, which may be one (e.g., Biruni) or two (e.g., Harun al-Rashid) words. If the person is well known by both long and short versions of his or her name (e.g., Ahmad ibn Hanbal/Ibn Hanbal), or if there is more than one person with the same name (e.g., Razi), I use the longer version the first time and whenever it helps with clarification. If a pre-modern person's name has two words (e.g., Yunus Emre), the second word functions like a last name in the [Bibliography](#) and [Index](#).

In the [Bibliography](#), the overwhelming majority of translations are from Arabic into English; I specify the translations from languages other than Arabic and into languages other than English. For Arabic sources, I mostly rely on English translations. Unless noted otherwise, translations in the text and footnotes from original Arabic, French, and Turkish sources are mine.



## Introduction

In November 2014, the media reported that in a single month, the attacks perpetrated by sixteen different jihadi groups killed more than 5,000 people; most of this bloodshed befell Iraq, followed by Nigeria, Afghanistan, and Syria.<sup>1</sup> At least since September 11, 2001, the world media has frequently covered Muslim perpetrators in terrorism, minor conflicts, and wars. The prominence of Muslims in this coverage cannot entirely be disregarded as journalistic sensationalism or bias. Scholarly data support the disproportionate attention to Muslims in reporting on violence. Two-thirds of all wars and about one-third of all minor military conflicts in 2009 occurred in Muslim-majority countries.<sup>2</sup>

Muslim-majority countries have also experienced disproportionate rates of authoritarianism, which is a major factor leading to violence. In 2013, Freedom House classified less than one-fifth of the forty-nine Muslim-majority countries as electoral democracies, while classifying three-fifths of the 195 countries in the world as electoral democracies. Authoritarianism is also a multifaceted phenomenon; it is associated with several factors, especially socioeconomic underdevelopment. Around 2010, Muslim-majority countries' averages of gross national income per capita (GNIPc), literacy rate, years of schooling, and life expectancy were all below world averages, as [Table I.1](#) indicates. These data lead us to ask: Why are Muslim-majority countries less peaceful, less democratic, less developed?

<sup>1</sup> Ian Black, "Jihadi Groups Killed More than 5,000 People in November," *Guardian*, December 10, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> See [Table I.1](#). For the data showing Muslim groups' disproportionate involvement in terrorism, see [Chapter 1](#).

TABLE 1.1 *Muslim-Majority Countries and the World (around 2010)*

	Muslim-majority countries (49)	All countries (around 195)
Violence (total numbers)	Wars: 4 Minor conflicts: 9	Wars: 6 Minor conflicts: 30
Authoritarianism	Electoral democracies: 14%	Electoral democracies: 60%
Underdevelopment (averages)	GNIpc: \$9,000 Literary rate: 73% Schooling: 5.8 years Life expectancy: 66 years	GNIpc: \$14,000 Literary rate: 84% Schooling: 7.5 years Life expectancy: 69 years

Sources: Violence: Uppsala Conflict Data Program's (UCDP) 2009 data quoted in Harborn and Vallensteen 2010, 506–7. UCDP defines conflicts that cause at least 1,000 casualties as wars and those that lead to between 25 and 999 casualties as minor conflicts. Electoral democracies: Freedom House 2013. GNIpc: World Bank 2010. In my calculation, I excluded Qatar's GNIpc (\$179,000), which was about three times higher than the second highest in the world, Luxembourg (\$61,790). Literacy rates: United Nations Statistics Division 2013. Years of schooling and life expectancy: United Nations Development Programme 2011.

Contemporary problems of Muslim-majority countries<sup>3</sup> are especially puzzling given the scholarly and socioeconomic achievements of their predecessors between the eighth and twelfth centuries. During that period, the Muslim world produced creative polymaths, such as Farabi, Biruni, and Ibn Sina, and played a pivotal role in intercontinental trade,<sup>4</sup> while Western Europe<sup>5</sup> was a marginal corner of the Old World.<sup>6</sup> This historical experience shows that Islam was perfectly compatible with scholarly flourishing and socioeconomic progress.

<sup>3</sup> For the sake of simplicity, from now on, I will refer to “Muslim-majority countries” as “Muslim countries.”

<sup>4</sup> During that period, Muslim merchants invented several economic tools, such as the check and the bill of exchange. Braudel 1982, 556; Udovitch 1979, 263, 269; Van Zanden 2009, 61. The “Persian word *sakk* is the origin of our word ‘check.’” Bloom and Blair 2002, 114.

<sup>5</sup> In analyzing the Middle Ages, this book generally uses the terms “Western Christians” or “Catholics” when comparing them with another religious/cultural entity, “Muslims.” Yet, especially by the Reformation and the Enlightenment, it becomes increasingly difficult to use these terms given the complex religious and secular identities in Western Europe. Thus, for modern periods I use the term “Western Europeans,” referring to a cultural/civilizational, rather than simply geographical, entity. By Western European countries, I mean present members of the European Union, excluding Bulgaria, Cyprus, and Greece (which are in Eastern Europe), and adding Switzerland and Norway.

<sup>6</sup> In the late eighth century, Muslim economic influence on Western Europe was so deep that in the English kingdom of Mercia, King Offa minted imitations of the Abbasid gold coin carrying the bungled Arabic inscriptions “There is no deity but God [Allah], who is without associates” and “Muhammad is the Prophet of God [Allah].” Beckett 2003, 58.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, however, a gradual process of reversal in terms of comparative levels of scientific and socioeconomic development started between the Muslim world and Western Europe. Especially between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, Western Europe experienced multiple progressive transformations, while the Muslim world became stagnant and fell behind. When widespread Western colonization of Muslim lands began in the mid-nineteenth century, Muslims had already faced multiple intellectual, socioeconomic, and political problems.

Hence, contemporary Muslim countries' political and socioeconomic problems have long-term historical origins and cannot simply be explained as the result of either Islam or Western colonialism. The difference between the intellectually and economically dynamic Muslim world during its early history, on the one hand, and the stagnant Muslim world during its later history, on the other, requires more nuanced and sophisticated explanation. What historical factors explain this difference and constitute the roots of Muslims' contemporary problems?

#### THE ULEMA—STATE ALLIANCE

I argue that the relations between religious, political, intellectual, and economic classes have been the main engine behind the changes in and reversals between the levels of development in the Muslim world, as well as in Western Europe. In early Islamic history, Islamic scholars generally regarded close entanglements with political authorities as corrupting; they preferred to be funded by commerce and maintained close relations with merchants. According to one analysis I will elaborate later, from the eighth to the mid-eleventh century, 72.5 percent of Islamic scholars or their families worked in commerce and/or industry.<sup>7</sup>

Islamic scholars' distance from state authorities went back to the mid-seventh century, when the Umayyads established their dynasty by persecuting the Prophet Muhammad's descendants and violently crushing any opposition to their rule. This violent consolidation of power led to the disenchantment with the political authority in the eyes of many Islamic scholars. These scholars' aloofness with respect to political authorities was reinforced in the late Umayyad and early Abbasid eras, from the mid-eighth to the mid-ninth century. During this period, the four main Sunni schools of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) were founded by independent scholars – Abu Hanifa, Malik, Shafii, and Ahmad ibn Hanbal – all of whom refused to be state servants. Moreover, these founders were imprisoned and persecuted by authorities due to their dissenting opinions. Shii religious leaders faced even more persecution by the political class.

In early Islamic history, Islamic scholars' independence from the state and the economic influence of merchants enabled the freedom of thought enjoyed by

<sup>7</sup> Cohen 1970, 36 (table A-I).

philosophers, a diverse group including not only Sunni and Shii Muslims, but also Christians, Jews, and agnostics. These philosophers were funded by both merchants and political authorities. The rulers particularly patronized the translation of ancient works (from Greek, Syriac, Middle Persian, and Sanskrit into Arabic). Yet there were no state-led schools to standardize philosophy. Thus, state patronage of philosophers in early Islamic history was less harmful for intellectual flourishing than what would become the state patronage of Islamic scholars (the *ulema*; sing. *alim*) following the eleventh century.

What happened in eleventh-century Central Asia, Iran, and Iraq was a multi-dimensional transformation. Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad, severely weakened by the rising Shii states in North Africa, Egypt, Syria, and even Iraq, called for the unification of Sunni Muslims to meet this threat. In order to unify Sunni sultans, *ulema*, and masses, two Abbasid caliphs declared a “Sunni creed” in the early eleventh century; those whose views were deemed to contradict this creed, including certain Shiis, rationalist theologians (*Mutazilis*), and philosophers, were declared to be apostates and faced the threat of execution. This call for the formation of a Sunni orthodoxy coincided with the rise of the Ghaznavids, a Sunni military state in Central Asia. Later, the Seljuk Empire (1040–1194) emerged as an even more powerful Sunni military state that ruled over a large territory including most parts of Central Asia, Iran, Iraq, and Anatolia.

Central to Seljuk rule was the expansion of the *iqta*, an existing system of land revenue assignment and tax farming designed to bring agricultural revenues in particular and the economy in general under military control. This policy weakened the economic capacity and social position of merchants, who had previously provided funding to both the *ulema* and philosophers. One Seljuk grand vizier (minister) also initiated the foundation of a series of madrasas, the so-called *Nizamiyyas*, to synthesize competing Sunni schools of jurisprudence and theology and to produce Sunni *ulema* who could challenge Shiis, *Mutazilis*, and philosophers. A genius scholar, Ghazali, played a key role in this project, writing multiple influential books criticizing these three “unorthodox” groups.

From the twelfth to the fourteenth century, the Seljuk model of the *ulema*–state alliance spread to other Sunni states in Andalus, Egypt, and Syria, particularly the Mamluks. The Crusader and Mongol invasions accelerated the spread of this alliance because Muslim communities sought refuge from the chaos of foreign invasion in military and religious authorities. Later, around the sixteenth century, Muslims established three powerful military empires: the Sunni Ottoman, the Shii Safavid, and the Sunni-run (but non-sectarian) Mughal Empires. These empires established versions of the *ulema*–state alliance in territories extending from the Balkans to Bengal.<sup>8</sup> These empires were militarily

<sup>8</sup> Although these three empires dominated the Muslim world, there existed other Muslim political entities, including small states in what we call today Indonesia and Malaysia. Unlike the three empires, several of these Southeast Asian states did not have an *ulema*–state alliance and they were mainly mercantile. Hefner 2000, 14, 26; Lombard 2000, 120; Reid 1993a, chs. 1 and 2.

very powerful, but they failed to revive early Muslims' intellectual and economic dynamism because they virtually eliminated philosophers and marginalized merchants.<sup>9</sup>

While the Muslim world was losing its intellectual and economic momentum, Western European progress began. In the second half of the eleventh century, three transformations occurred in Western Europe. First, the Catholic Church and royal authorities tried and failed to dominate one another, leading to the institutionalization of the separation between them as a *modus vivendi*. This substantially contributed to decentralization and balance of power among Western European actors and institutions. Second, universities started to be established and provided an institutional basis for the gradual emergence and increasing influence of the intellectual class. Many revolutionary thinkers, from Aquinas to Luther, from Copernicus to Galileo and Newton, would be university graduates and professors. Third, the merchant class, which would be the engine of Western European economic breakthroughs, began to flourish.<sup>10</sup> These new relations among religious, political, intellectual, and economic classes eventually drove various progressive processes, including the Renaissance, the printing revolution, geographical explorations, the Protestant Reformation, the scientific revolution, the American and French Revolutions, and the Industrial Revolution. As a result of these processes, Western Europe surpassed its once-superior competitors, the Muslim world and China.

After nearly a century of Western colonialism, Muslims began to establish independent states in the 1920s and 1930s. These states inherited deep political and socioeconomic problems as a result of centuries of intellectual and economic stagnation followed by colonial exploitation. In order to address the problems of violence, authoritarianism, and socioeconomic underdevelopment, Muslim countries needed creative intellectuals (i.e., thinkers who criticize established perspectives and produce original alternatives) and independent bourgeoisie (i.e., economic entrepreneurs, such as merchants, bankers, and

These states, however, could not provide an alternative model of class relations to the Muslim world for two main reasons. First, even as late as the sixteenth century, Islam co-existed with local religious beliefs and practices in these states. According to Anthony Reid (1993b, 156), "no Islamic texts in Southeast Asian languages which date before 1590 have come to light." See also Reid 1993a, ch. 3. Second, European colonization began as early as the seventeenth century in this region. Hence, the period between Islamization and colonization was too short to establish a Southeast Asian model. Moreover, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Middle Eastern interpretations of Islam influenced Southeast Asian Muslims, rather than vice versa. Hefner 2009, 15–23.

<sup>9</sup> After Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) in history, Ali Kushji (d. 1474) in astronomy, and Taftazani (d. 1390) and Jurjani (d. 1414) in theology, the Muslim world very rarely produced scholars in that caliber, with few exceptions such as Takiyuddin (d. 1585) in astronomy and Mulla Sadra (d. 1640) in philosophy.

<sup>10</sup> European universities taught translations of several works of Muslim polymaths, such as Ibn Sina, until the sixteenth century.

industrialists).<sup>11</sup> Yet these two classes did not emerge in most Muslim countries, an absence I attribute to the historical (post-eleventh-century) dominance of the ulema–state alliance. Nonetheless, starting with Turkey and Iran in the 1920s, new states that were formed in the Muslim world – with few exceptions such as Saudi Arabia – did away with the ulema–state alliance and embraced more secular arrangements of political power. But why, even in these cases of political secularization, did independent intellectual and bourgeois classes not emerge in an influential manner?

#### SECULARISTS AND ISLAMIC ACTORS

Despite their century-long struggles against each other, secularists and Islamic actors have both contributed to the enduring marginalization of intellectuals and the bourgeoisie in their societies. There are three main explanations for the secularists' contribution. First, most twentieth-century secularist leaders in such cases as Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Algeria, Tunisia, Pakistan, and Indonesia were former military officers. By training and socialization, they were unlikely to truly appreciate the importance of intellectuals and the bourgeoisie for the political and economic development of their countries. Second, these secularist leaders were generally under the influence of socialist and fascist ideologies, in particular, and authoritarian modernist ideas, in general. Thus, they imposed ideological views to society and established state control over the economy by restricting the intellectual and bourgeois classes. Third, many secularist rulers have arbitrarily tried to use Islam to legitimize their regimes. Such cooptation has eventually promoted the established ulema at the expense of independent Islamic scholars and intellectuals.

Though they were founded by secularist leaders, many modern states in the Muslim world experienced Islamization of public life as a result of policy failures of the secularists and general conservatism of Muslim societies. Islamization has elevated the status of three groups of Islamic actors, who have shared negative attitudes toward intellectuals and the bourgeoisie. One group is the ulema, who are trained in madrasas or their more modernized equivalents (such as Turkey's departments of theologies) in Islamic disciplines, including jurisprudence, the hadith, and Quranic exegesis. Another group is the Islamists, who engage in electoral or other types of politics through political parties and movements. The third group is the Sufi shaykhs, who are mystical and social leaders of Sufi orders (*tariqas*).

Despite their internal disagreements, these Islamic actors have shared negative attitudes toward the independent bourgeoisie, given their statist and hierarchical outlook, according to which religious and political authorities are

<sup>11</sup> According to Eric Hobsbawm (1987, 170), the definition of the bourgeoisie is “notoriously difficult” and various Western languages include such “shifting and imprecise categories” as “big bourgeoisie” or “petty bourgeoisie.”

supposed to hold the highest social status. These Islamic actors have also had a common anti-intellectual attitude. This attitude follows the ulema's epistemology, which is based on four hierarchical sources: the Quran, hadiths (the records of the Prophet's words and actions), consensus of the ulema (*ijma*), and analogical reasoning (*qiyas*).<sup>12</sup> Two characteristics of this epistemology discourage new interpretations of Islam, particularly by Muslim intellectuals. First, it restricts reason to making analogies on points where the literal meanings of the Quran and hadiths offer no clear ruling, and where there is a lack of consensus among the scholars.<sup>13</sup> Second, and relatedly, it establishes the consensus of the ulema as an entrenched authority, which weakens alternative views.

In fact, the basis of consensus as a jurisprudential concept is a hadith: "My community will never agree upon an error." The term "community" here referred to Muslim people at large. If it had continued to be understood in this broad manner, this concept could have provided opportunities for participation and change. However, the ulema have monopolized the concept of consensus by exclusively interpreting it with reference to themselves, turning it into "a bulwark of conservatism."<sup>14</sup>

Early Muslims actually assigned a more significant and emancipatory role to reason. Abu Hanifa (699–767), the founder of earliest Sunni school of jurisprudence, acknowledged a jurist's reason-based judgment as an important source of jurisprudential authority. Two generations later, however, Shafii developed the jurisprudential method that prioritized the literal understanding of the Qur'an and hadiths followed by the consensus of the ulema, limiting the role of reason to mere analogy. Moreover, with the works of such eminent ulema as Ghazali, Shafii's jurisprudential method influenced other fields of Islamic knowledge such as theology and Sufism.<sup>15</sup> At first, Shafii's method was one of the many alternative jurisprudential approaches. By the establishment of the ulema–state alliance starting in the eleventh century, however, it gradually became the main pillar of Sunni orthodoxy. Ultimately, Hanafis adopted this methodology, as did Malikis and Hanbalis.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The way the Muslim Brothers led the drafting of a new Egyptian constitution in November 2012 reflects Islamists' acknowledgment of the ulema's authority to interpret Islamic law. In this drafting, Islamist Brothers constitutionally empowered Al-Azhar's senior ulema with a consultative authority "in matters relating to" Islamic law (article 4), which was "the principle source of legislation" in Egypt (article 2). See also Euben and Zaman 2009, 19; Roy 1996, x.

<sup>13</sup> The Shii ulema's epistemology is similar, though for them consensus is less authoritative, and they put more emphasis on reason. Weiss 1998, 36. The overwhelming majority (87–90%) of Muslims in the world are Sunni and the rest (10–13%) are Shii. Pew Research Center 2009, 1. Among Muslim countries, forty-five are Sunni-majority, while the remaining four (Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan, and Bahrain) are Shii-majority.

<sup>14</sup> Lambton 1981, 10, 12. <sup>15</sup> Al-Ghazali 2015 [c. 1097].

<sup>16</sup> Lambton 1981, 4; McAuliffe 2015, 196; Abou El Fadl 2014, xxxiv–vii.

Consequently, Shafii's jurisprudential method became a dominant epistemology that came to order other aspects of knowledge in the Muslim world. "If it were admissible to name Islamic culture according to one of its products," wrote Mohammed Abed al-Jabri in the 1980s, "then we would call it 'the culture of *fiqh* (jurisprudence)' in the same sense that applies to Greek culture when we call it a 'culture of philosophy' and contemporary European culture as a 'culture of science and technology.'" For Jabri, the rules of jurisprudence established by Shafii "are no less important in forming Arab-Islamic reason than the 'rules of methodology' posited by Descartes about the formation of French reason."<sup>17</sup>

There have been some attempts to include additional sources of knowledge into this jurisprudential epistemology. Although Ghazali was a leading promoter of this epistemology, particularly its sidelining of reason, he was also a sophisticated scholar with complex, if not always consistent, ideas. He promoted the idea of the five "higher objectives" of Islamic law. About three centuries later, the Andalusian jurist Shatibi elaborated these five objectives – the protection of religion, of life, of intellect, of progeny, and of property – as a way of making jurisprudence more flexible.<sup>18</sup> Sufi shaykhs' promotion of mystical knowledge was another attempt to relax the epistemological constraints on Muslim intellectual life.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, these efforts have mostly remained inconsequential in comparison to the dominant epistemology originally formulated by Shafii, which assigns a marginal role to reason and no role to empirical experience. This epistemology has been a source of the anti-intellectualism among the ulema, Islamists, and Sufi shaykhs.

From the 1980s onward, many Muslim countries experienced Islamization of the public life,<sup>20</sup> as part of the global rise of religious movements.<sup>21</sup> The ulema, Islamists, and Sufis gained more public influence and reinforced the marginalization of the intellectual and bourgeois classes. The secularists by and large have been similarly anti-intellectual and anti-bourgeois in implementing their authoritarian secularist ideologies and policies. Under these class conditions, Muslim countries have mostly failed to solve their multifaceted and historically rooted problems.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Jabri 2011 [1984], 109, 114.

<sup>18</sup> Opwis 2010; Masud 1995; al-Raysuni 2005; Zaman 2012, ch. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Ghazali also played a role in promoting mystical knowledge. He depicted the emphasis on *fiqh* as an exaggeration and tried to balance it with Sufism. Ghazali (2015 [c. 1097], 87–90) noted that the word *fiqh* mentioned in the Quran and hadiths does not mean jurisprudence (in terms of knowing the details of legal issues) but rather implies such broader things as understanding, piety, and mystical insight. For more on Ghazali, see Chapter 4.

<sup>20</sup> A recent survey conducted in fifteen Middle Eastern and North African countries between 2002 and 2010 shows that 70 percent of respondents define themselves Muslim above all national or other identities. Tessler 2015, 81.

<sup>21</sup> Casanova 1994; Berger 1999; Juergensmeyer 2007.

Those who see Islam as inherently rejecting religion–state separation may regard my explanation as pessimistic. For them, if the ulema–state alliance is the source of Muslims’ problems, then there is no way to solve them, because the alliance is based on Islam’s essentially non-separationist approach to religion–state relations. However, my analysis actually explains that the ulema–state alliance is neither an essential part of the Quran and hadiths nor a permanent feature of Islamic history. Early Islamic history includes examples of religion–state separation, and it is a mistake to see Islam as inherently rejecting such separation. But what might be the cause of this widespread and by now conventional misunderstanding?

#### RELIGION AND THE STATE (*DIN WA DAWLA*)

There are two main sources of the conventional view about Islam’s relationship with the state. One source is the body of work by Western (i.e., North American and Western European) scholars who have taken the ulema’s quasi-Islamic political views written during and after the eleventh century as the definition of what is essentially Islamic. In his well-known book, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam*, Erwin Rosenthal falsely attributes a saying to the Prophet Muhammad: “[R]eligion and (‘secular’) power are twins.”<sup>22</sup> Rosenthal claims that it is Ghazali who quotes this “hadith.”<sup>23</sup> In *Moderation in Belief* – cited by Rosenthal – Ghazali does indeed define religion and the state as twins: “[I]t has been said that religion and sultan are twins, and also that religion is a foundation and the sultan is a guard: that which has no foundation collapses and that which has no guard is lost.”<sup>24</sup> Yet, when Ghazali wrote, “it has been said,” he was not referring to a hadith. In fact, the maxim “religion and royal authority are twins” was a well-known saying, not of Prophetic but of Sasanian origin.<sup>25</sup>

A century and a half before Ghazali, the historian Masudi quoted an Arabic translation of a Sasanian text in his book. In Masudi’s narrative, the founder of the Sasanian Empire, Ardashir I (r. 224–42), provided the following advice in his testament: “Religion and royal authority are twins, who cannot exist without each other; because, religion is the foundation of royal authority and royal authority is the guard of religion. Any structure that does not repose on a foundation collapses, and any structure that is not guarded perishes.”<sup>26</sup> Before Masudi, the Testament of Ardashir had been translated from Middle Persian into Arabic several times, the first of which was completed as early as the eighth century.<sup>27</sup> In sum, the origin of the idea of religion–state

<sup>22</sup> Rosenthal 1958, 8. For a similar perspective, see Lambton 1981, xv.

<sup>23</sup> A “[h]adith he [Ghazali] quotes . . . : ‘Religion and (temporal) power are twins.’” Rosenthal 1958, 39.

<sup>24</sup> Al-Ghazali 2013 [1095], 231. <sup>25</sup> Bagley 1964, xlii; Abbès 2015, 56.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Maçoudi 1863 [947], 162. See also “Le Testament d’Ardasir” 1966 [n.a.], 49, 62.

<sup>27</sup> Askari 2016, 155; Boyce 1968, 14.

brotherhood in the Muslim world is a Sasanian, not an Islamic, text. I elaborate more on this issue in [Chapter 4](#).

In various episodes of his life, Ghazali (1058–1111) had inconsistent relations with state authorities – another indication that Islam–state relations have never been straightforward. Early in his career, Ghazali taught in a state-controlled madrasa and was subject to direct influence from the rulers. Later on, Ghazali renounced all affiliation with the state to become an independent Sufi and scholar, by declaring his regret for previous entanglements with state authorities.<sup>28</sup> Things changed again toward the end of Ghazali’s life, when he briefly returned to teaching in a public madrasa. Ghazali’s writings reflect this inconsistent relationship with the state. In his magnum opus, *The Revival of Religious Sciences*, which promotes Sufism, Ghazali reiterated his lines about religion–state brotherhood<sup>29</sup> but also urged the ulema to avoid close connections with rulers, defining the latter as generally corrupt and repressive.<sup>30</sup> Thus, despite the construction of the ulema–state alliance in the eleventh century, the earlier ulema’s ideas about the necessary distance between scholars and political authorities partially survived in Muslim lands.

Islamist propaganda is the second source of the misperception of Islam as inherently opposed to religion–state separation. Although Islamists have gained power in only a few countries, they have helped drive the Islamization of the public sphere across the Muslim world and informed perceptions of Islam around the globe. Throughout the twentieth century, Islamist leaders, including Hassan al-Banna (the founder of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt), Abul Ala Maududi (the founder of Jamaat-i Islami in the Indian subcontinent), and Ruhollah Khomeini (the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran), rejected the notion of a secular state and championed the integration of religion and state, going beyond the pre-modern notion of a religion–state alliance.

Al-Banna (1906–43) popularized the idea that Islam is both religion and the state, “*al-Islam din wa dawla*.”<sup>31</sup> Khomeini (1902–89) was both a prominent member of the Shii ulema and an Islamist revolutionary leader.<sup>32</sup> For Khomeini, the “slogan of the separation of religion and politics and the demand that Islamic scholars not intervene in social and political affairs” are

<sup>28</sup> Griffel 2009, 43–4.

<sup>29</sup> “[T]he state and religion are twins. Religion is the foundation while the state is the guard. That which has no foundation will certainly crumble and that which has no guard is lost.” Al-Ghazali 1962 [c. 1097], 33–4. See also Gazali 1974a [c. 1097], 51.

<sup>30</sup> Al-Ghazali 1962 [c. 1097], 172–6; al-Ghazali 2015 [c. 1097], 199–203; Gazali 1974b [c. 1097], 344.

<sup>31</sup> Al-Banna 1979 [1938–45], 179; also 18, 317–18, 356. The Muslim Brothers, according to Banna, are calling people to Islam and “government is part of it.” If the critics say, “This is politics!” they should reply: “This is Islam, and we do not recognize such divisions.” Al-Banna 1978 [1938–45], 36. See al-Banna 1979 [1938–45], 110.

<sup>32</sup> Maududi also had a madrasa education but concealed that fact. Nasr 1996, 19; Moosa 2015, 24.

propagated by the imperialists, and “it is only the irreligious who repeat them.”<sup>33</sup> Khomeini’s idea of the guardianship of the jurist (*velayat-e faqih*), which entailed the ulema’s domination of both judicial and executive powers in an unprecedented manner, became the basis of the post-revolutionary politico-legal system in Iran.

In the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, there have also been Western scholars and Muslim thinkers who argued that Islam did not inherently reject religion–state separation. Historian Ira Lapidus argued in several publications that a certain level of Islam–state separation existed in early Islamic history. For him, the ulema–state alliance emerged during and after the eleventh century.<sup>34</sup>

Three Muslim thinkers have similarly and compellingly argued that religion–state separation is integral to Islamic thought and practice. One Muslim thinker who advocated a certain level of separation between Islam and the state was Seyyid Bey, an Islamic jurist and member of the Ottoman ulema. After the founding of the Turkish Republic, he became the minister of justice. Seyyid Bey gave the famous speech in the Turkish Parliament in 1924 that convinced many deputies to abolish the caliphate. The speech argued for the necessity and reality of a certain level of Islam–state separation by claiming that (1) Islam did not require a political institution such as the caliphate and that it allowed people to determine their own political institutions; (2) the caliphate had been based on the representation of the people, and the new and true representative of the people was the parliament; (3) the Prophet Muhammad stated that the true caliphate would last only thirty years after him and then would be followed by the corrupt sultanate; and (4) many Arabs chose to ally with Britain against the Ottoman caliph during World War I.<sup>35</sup>

A year later, Ali Abdel Razek, an Egyptian Islamic jurist and judge, wrote an influential treatise against the idea of an Islamic caliphate. He argues that (1) there is no evidence in the Qur’an or hadiths about the necessity of an Islamic political authority (caliph); (2) the Prophet Muhammad’s political acts were results of mundane needs, not a part of his main religious mission; (3) the Prophet left behind neither a political successor nor a political system; and (4) the history of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates was full of rebellions and oppression, which showed the corrupt nature of politics.<sup>36</sup>

About a century later, another Egyptian, Gamal al-Banna, defended a similar thesis. He was a self-made Muslim thinker, a left-wing author, as well as the youngest brother of Hassan al-Banna. In *Al-Islam Din wa Ummah wa Laysa Dinan wa Dawlah (Islam Is Religion and Community, Not Religion and the*

<sup>33</sup> Khomeini 1981 [1970], 38. See also Maududi 1960, esp. 202–4.

<sup>34</sup> Lapidus 1975; Lapidus 1996. <sup>35</sup> Bey 1969 [1924], 40–61; Bey 1942 [1924].

<sup>36</sup> Abdel Razek 2012 [1925], esp. 36–56, 71–4, 87–96, 104–7. For proponents and opponents of Abdel Razek’s thesis, see Filali-Ansary 2002, esp. 47–77; Filali-Ansary 2003, 95–114; Radhan 2014, 22–4, 112–25; Ali 2009.

*State*), Gamal argues that state power inherently and inevitably corrupts any religion, including Islam. He lists the Quranic verses that stress that the Prophet Muhammad was a messenger, not a ruler; that putting the faith in people's hearts is up to God, not a human authority, even the Prophet; that believing or not believing is a personal choice; that there is no worldly punishment for apostasy; and that Islam emphasizes the community, not the state. Gamal held that the Prophet's political authority should not be taken as a model today, because his governance was very different from the modern state, in terms of the latter's institutionalized coercive and other capacities.<sup>37</sup>

Unlike Hassan al-Banna, Maududi, and Khomeini, these Muslim thinkers who endorsed religion–state separation had only a marginal impact on Muslim politics. Although Seyyid Bey was not an Islamist, he was too Islamically conservative for the taste of Mustafa Kemal (later, Atatürk). Immediately after Seyyid Bey helped to abolish the caliphate, Mustafa Kemal replaced him with a new, staunchly secularist minister of justice. Abdel Razek also faced a similar dismissal, which came from the ulema, who unlike their counterpart in secularizing Turkey, were still influential in Egypt. In response to Abdel Razek's book criticizing the idea of the caliphate, the ulema council of Al-Azhar – the famous madrasa from which he graduated – condemned him, revoked his license, and thus made him unable to serve as a judge. More recently, the influence of Gamal al-Banna did not even come close to that of his Islamist older brother.

There are two reasons for the limited influence of these Muslim thinkers. First, their middle-way position between Islamists and secularists won support from neither of these two polarized groups. Second, the idea of an Islam–state alliance, or more specifically the ulema–state alliance, was so well established in Turkish, Egyptian, and many other Muslim societies that whoever criticized it was likely to be marginalized, if not persecuted.

**Part I** of this book will examine how the ulema, the authoritarian state, and various alliances between them have substantially contributed to problems of violence, authoritarianism, and underdevelopment in many Muslim countries today. **Part II** will analyze how the ulema–state alliance began to emerge in the eleventh century – a critical juncture before which Muslims had achieved scholarly and socioeconomic progress and after which they started to experience intellectual and socioeconomic stagnation.

<sup>37</sup> Al-Banna 2003, 3–4, 12–18, 38–9. See also al-Banna 2001.

PART I

PRESENT