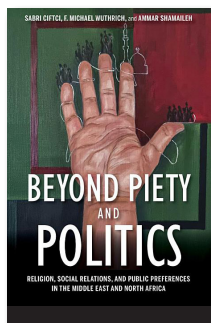


## BOOK REVIEW

### ***Beyond Piety and Politics: Religion, Social Relations, and Public Preferences in the Middle East and North Africa.***

By Sabri Ciftci, F. Michael Wuthrich, and Ammar Shamaileh. Bloomington. Indiana University Press, 2022. xv + 251 pp. ISBN 978-0-253-06275-8 (hardcover); 978-0-253-06276-5 (paperback); 978-0-253-06274-1 (e-book). \$70.00 (hardcover); \$28.00 (paperback); \$27.99 (e-book).



The book's central argument is that simplistic, monolithic measures of religiosity can fundamentally obscure the internal pluralism existing among devout Muslims. This oversight, often rooted in Orientalist and essentialist scholarship, can lead to partial analyses and problematic policy decisions. The book offers a response to these assumptions, arguing that understanding the diverse religious outlooks of individuals is crucial for comprehending the complex interplay between Islam and politics.

The authors illustrate this basic problem using examples from Turkey and Egypt. They introduce figures like Adnan Oktar, a televangelist blending conservative Islamic rhetoric with sexually provocative imagery, in sharp contrast to the traditionalist Cübbeli Ahmet Hoca. Similarly, the “leftist Islamist” Ahsan Eliaçık, an opponent of the ruling AK Party, stands alongside these figures. In Egypt, Amr Khaled's tolerant preaching differs from his Salafi counterparts and the militant Hisham Ashmawi. As the authors highlight, despite vastly different social, economic, and political preferences, all these individuals and their followers identify as deeply pious. This raises the book's core question: how can such significant nuances in the religious identity of these individuals be captured using conventional measures, and what significance do these distinctions hold for understanding their attitudes and behavior (27)?

The book's structure systematically unpacks its central argument across eight chapters, following an insightful Introduction and preceding a concise Conclusion. Chapter 1, “Religious Communities, the State, and

Religious Outlooks,” lays the theoretical groundwork by arguing that religion influences preferences relationally through dynamics between religious communities and broader society. Chapter Two, “Attitudes of the Devout: The Nature of the Substance or the Nurture of Relationship?,” delves into the nuanced interplay between individual piety and communal relationships. The book then moves to its empirical core: Chapter Three, “Empirical Foundations of Religious Outlooks,” details the methodology for empirically measuring religious outlooks using public opinion surveys. Chapter Four, “The Individual and Contextual Determinants of Muslim Religious Outlooks in MENA,” investigates the factors shaping these outlooks in the MENA region. The subsequent chapters apply this framework to specific political outcomes: Chapter Five, “Islam and Support for Democracy,” examines the relationship between religious outlooks and democratic preferences. Chapter Six, “Temporal Change in Religious Outlooks and Political Preferences,” explores how these outlooks and their political implications evolve over time. Chapter Seven, “Islam and Distributive Preferences,” analyzes the role of religious outlooks in shaping economic preferences. Finally, the Conclusion summarizes the findings and discusses the applicability of the theoretical framework to broader contexts.

The book’s main contribution lies in its development of a multi-dimensional conceptualization of “religious outlooks.” Moving beyond linear assessments of piety, it proposes that religious outlooks function as cognitive frameworks that shape one’s understanding of religion’s role in social and political orders. This framework identifies four key categories based on individuals’ valuing of social pluralism versus conformity, and their preference for religion’s public versus private role: Religious Individualists, Post-Islamists, Social Communitarians, and Religious Communitarians. This typology provides researchers with an analytical tool for analyzing interfaith differences, offering a much deeper lens than broad religious categories.

The methodology employed in this study is a robust mixed-methods design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The authors conduct qualitative case explorations, such as their detailed study of Naqshbandi communities in Turkey (Chapter Two), which reveal the dynamic variation within a single religious group. This qualitative depth is complemented by rigorous quantitative analysis of extensive survey data, primarily from the Arab Barometer surveys. They utilize advanced statistical techniques like latent class analysis and regression models to empirically measure and predict the distribution of these religious outlooks, demonstrating the influence of individual and contextual factors (e.g., state-religion relations) on their formation. This dual approach not only validates

their conceptual model but also provides a practical research methodology for future studies seeking to unpack complex variations in belief and practice.

The book critiques the influence of simplistic assumptions, showing how political actors themselves often misinterpret the diversity among the devout. It highlights the unintended consequences of such miscalculations in the Iranian Revolution and the AK Party's strategies during the Gezi protests in Turkey, where diverse Islamist groups acted contrary to monolithic expectations. Furthermore, the rise of anti-Muslim sentiment in the West and the failures of multicultural policies are also attributed to the faulty assumption of a singular "Muslim outlook." The book argues that recognizing the relational and dynamic nature of religious outlooks, shaped by social context and communal associations, offers an alternative to these partial understandings.

While the book makes a significant scholarly contribution, a few areas might invite further exploration. Its focus on MENA societies provides rich empirical grounding, yet a more explicit and extensive application of its framework to a wider array of global Muslim contexts, or to diverse religious communities beyond Islam, could further strengthen the universal applicability of its proposed typology. Additionally, given the complexity of the analytical categories, some readers might seek deeper qualitative narratives to fully illuminate the lived experiences underpinning each "religious outlook," though the book offers a suitable balance between breadth and analytical depth.

This book offers a valuable resource for professional specialists in political science, sociology of religion, and Middle Eastern studies, equipping them with a nuanced conceptual framework and a rigorous methodological blueprint. Graduate students will find it particularly beneficial for developing advanced research questions and applying sophisticated analytical techniques. Moreover, its clear exposition of complex concepts makes it accessible to advanced undergraduates interested in the interplay of religion and politics. Politicians, media professionals, and policymakers with an interest in the Islamic world will find this book highly relevant, as it provides essential tools for moving beyond stereotypical perceptions and making more informed decisions.

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