

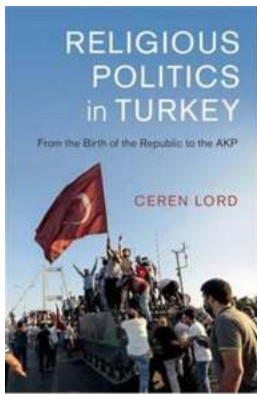
Religion and Politics in Turkey - Unraveling the Compelling Connection

Religion and politics have always been intertwined, shaping societies and influencing the way people perceive and engage with the world around them. In Turkey, a country known for its rich cultural heritage and diverse religious beliefs, the relationship between religion and politics is particularly fascinating. This article explores the complex dynamics that have shaped Turkey's religious and political landscape, and the implications it has for democracy, secularism, and the overall fabric of the nation.

The Historical Background

Turkey, with its geographical location bridging Europe and Asia, has a history deeply rooted in different religions and civilizations. In ancient times, it served as a cradle for numerous religions, including Greek mythology, Christianity, and later Islam. The rise of the Ottoman Empire in the 13th century further solidified the influence of Islam in the region, with the empire eventually becoming an Islamic state.

However, following the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923, a strong emphasis was placed on secularism and the separation of religion and state. Atatürk believed that religion should be a private matter, and his policies aimed to create a modern, Western-oriented state.



Religion and Politics in Turkey

by Alexander Gillespie (1st Edition, Kindle Edition)

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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Screen Reader : Supported
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled
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The Role of Islam in Turkish Politics

Despite the secular nature of the Turkish state, Islam has always played a significant role in the country's politics. The majority of Turkish citizens identify as Muslims, making it a crucial component of their cultural identity. Over the years, various Islamic political parties emerged, leading to a tug-of-war between secularism and religiosity in Turkish politics.

One of the most notable examples of this struggle was the rise of the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) in the 1990s, which sought to introduce Islamic principles into the political system. While the party was eventually banned, it paved the way for the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has been in power since 2002.

The AKP and Islamist Politics

The AKP, led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has undoubtedly reshaped the landscape of Turkish politics. While officially stating its commitment to secularism, the party has embraced a more conservative and Islamist agenda compared to its predecessors. Erdogan's leadership has been characterized by a significant

increase in religious symbolism in public spaces, economic policies favoring conservative Islamic businesses, and efforts to reset the country's moral compass.

This shift has drawn both support and criticism from different sections of Turkish society. While conservatives view the AKP as a champion of Islamic values and traditions, supporters of secularism have expressed concerns about the erosion of Turkey's secular foundations and fear the encroachment of religion into public life.

The Struggle for Secularism

Secularism has long been a core principle of the Turkish state, and there are concerns that the rise of political Islamism under the AKP threatens its foundation. Critics argue that Erdogan's government has been gradually undermining secular values, leading to increased polarization within society.

The tension between secularism and political Islam was evident during the Gezi Park protests of 2013, where a diverse group of demonstrators rallied against what they perceived as the creeping Islamization of the state. The government's response to the protests further ignited divisions, highlighting the ongoing struggle to define the role of religion in Turkish politics.

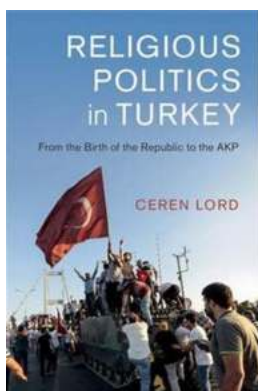
The Role of Religion in Everyday Life

Religion plays an integral part in the lives of many Turkish people, shaping their values, customs, and traditions. Mosques are a common sight across the country, and religious festivals and practices are deeply ingrained in Turkish society.

However, the extent to which religion influences public life has become a contentious issue. Discussions surrounding the hijab ban in government

institutions, restrictions on alcohol consumption, and the inclusion of religious education in schools have sparked debates over the balance between personal beliefs and the principles of a secular state.

Religion and politics in Turkey are intricately intertwined, with both shaping and being shaped by each other. The dynamic relationship between Islam and political power has had a profound impact on Turkish society, challenging the delicate balance between secularism and religiosity. Understanding this complex connection is crucial for comprehending the dynamics that influence Turkey's political landscape and the ongoing struggle for the country's future direction.



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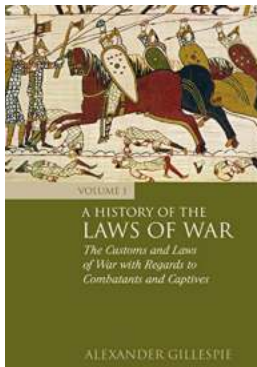
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Over the last decade the once marginal extreme right of the Turkish ideological spectrum has grown in size as well as in influence and has effectively reshaped party competition in Turkey. Policy mandates and electoral bases of the rising extreme right rely on potentially explosive social cleavages in the country. One such confrontation is between the secularist and pro-Islamist forces, which has always been one of the centrepieces of modern Turkish politics.

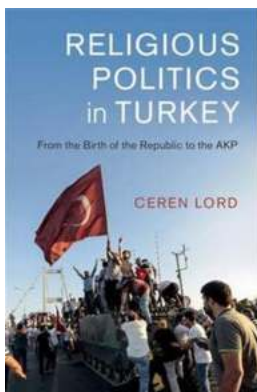
The rise of pro-Islamist electoral forces from a marginal to an undeniably imposing position in Turkish electoral politics has led many to worry that a deep-rooted schism has come to the forefront of Turkish politics. The frontline of this secularist vs pro-Islamist confrontation is quite widespread ranging from a debate around the ban of turban and headscarves in universities to religious education in the country, from Islamic principles in the economy to Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle Eastern countries.

This volume was previously published as a special issue of the journal Turkish Studies.



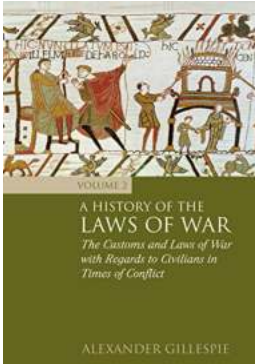
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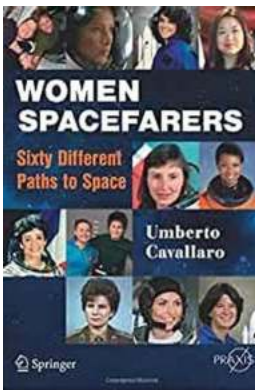
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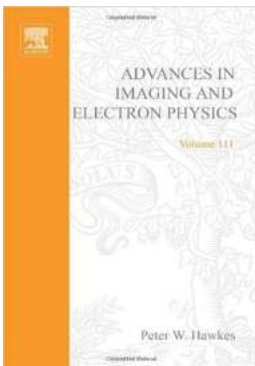
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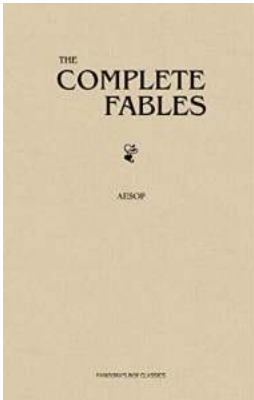
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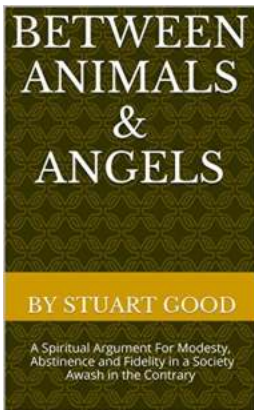
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