# A Political Theory of Muslim Democracy

By Ravza Altuntaş-Çakır
Edinburgh University Press, 2022, 306 pages, £85.00, ISBN: 9781474479547

Reviewed by Afshan Khan, İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim University

As someone who has a deep interest in multiculturalist political thought and is a keen observer of Middle Eastern politics, Ravza Altuntaş-Çakır offers a fresh and theoretical ground for Muslim democracy. *A Political Theory of Muslim Democracy* attempts to reconcile the debates among Muslim and Western thinkers and Islamic scholars over the viability of a practical form of democracy that can work best in Muslim-majority countries. In her book, she adopts a comparative political theory approach rather than a theological one.

The book is divided into three parts and comprises six chapters, excluding the introduction and conclusion. The author first highlights the existing debates about the requirement and possibilities of a Muslim democracy among scholars from different traditions in a methodical manner. After evaluating these discussions, the author proceeds to conceptualize and theorize Muslim democracy.

In the introduction, she reminds us that although the idea of a "Muslim democracy" is a recent phenomenon, "the political and philosophical debates on Islam and democracy date back to the early 20th century" (p. 3). Dankwart Rustow and Bernard Lewis cite the case of Türkiye as an exceptional example of a democracy with a Muslim majority. However, the term "Muslim Democracy" was coined by Vali Nasr in his 2005 article. Presenting the ideas of these scholars, the book argues that there is still a need for a systematic political theory of Muslim democracy.
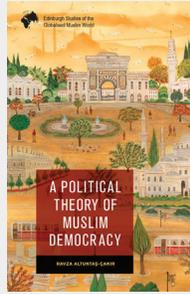
Moreover, the book criticizes the takes on the "Turkish model" for not consisting of the normative notion of what a Muslim democracy entails. To do this, the author reviews secondary source literature. She claims that using Türkiye as an example, the present debate on Muslim democracy mainly addresses the governance aspect, putting aside concerns with "state-religion relations, minority rights, individual freedoms, separation of powers, human rights and justice" (p. 4). A Muslim democracy in the author's definition is a constitutional democratic political system that operates in a predominantly Muslim society "where religion is a significant marker of social, cultural and political identity for sizeable sections of the society" (p. 20).

For a systematic conceptualization, Ravza Çakır examines both the Muslim and the Western multiculturalist traditions of political philosophy and attempts to develop a new model that can foster dialogue between Muslim and Western political thought. To identify areas of agreement between Muslim and multiculturalist philosophers, the book's opening section offers their respective typologies. The first chapter examines the fundamental beliefs and distinctions of Muslim intellectuals, classifying them as statists, revivalists, mod-

ernists, and progressives. The chapter 2 looks more closely at multiculturalist theory for an inclusive notion of democracy toward religion. To examine their perspectives on secularism, the public sphere, and institutional designs, they are divided into four groups: liberal pluralists, moral pluralists, legal pluralists, and institutional pluralists.

Chapter 3 has a long discussion about divine and popular sovereignty, Sharia law, and the compatibility argument about harmony between Islam and democracy. Here, she identifies the intellectual and normative constraints that hinder the development of a political theory of Muslim democracy. She rejects the compatibility argument as "Hybrid, ad hoc, and unsystematic" (p. 124). She also criticizes the reductionist claims made by scholars who have sought to find a vision of Islam for democracy, acceptance of democracy by Muslims as the only solution, or ignorance of the importance of public discussion.

The key ideas pertinent to the theme of the book are discussed in part three. This part contains the most fascinating discussion in the book. The conceptualizing and framing of a political theory of Muslim democracy is divided into three discussions contained in three subsequent chapters on pluralist secularism, a social public sphere, and a pluralizing constitution. Chapter 4 discusses the links of democracy with secularism and religion which the author differentiates as "secular Muslim democracy" and "unsecular Muslim democracy" (p. 160). Through a theory of Muslim democracy, the author proposes pluralist secularism. Her main contention is that the reason secularism is unpopular among Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is that it is an alien concept that gave rise to authoritarian regimes where citizens were kept out of the decision-making

process. This problem is addressed by Ravza Çakır 's theory. According to her, personal freedom and human rights cannot be subject to the majority's choice in a Muslim democracy (p. 165). She goes on to show how a change from universalist philosophical secularism to pluralist secularism might alter how religion and the state interact.

The author also outlines the four key aspects of pluralist secularism that are fundamental to a Muslim democracy: First, a morally minimal and limited state that will place restrictions on the power of the state to control religious matters. Second, religion as a component of politics, not the state, which suggests that public and private should not be strictly separated. Third, there should be a difference between the state public sphere and the public sphere. This distinction between the two kinds of the public sphere is a remarkable contribution of the author as it rules out the ambiguity lying with the phenomenon of "public" debate.

Discussing the constitutional setup of the Muslim democracy, the book utilizes existing constitutionalist theories. Synthesizing these theories, it proposes pluralizing constitutionalism according to the demands of Muslim democracy so that authoritarianism and mob rule can be eliminated. It contends that there should be an adherence to the unwavering safeguarding of fundamental human rights, the law-making process should be democratic (avoiding elitist tendency), and jurisdictional pluralism for various groups in private law. Succinctly, "Muslim Democracy" is a normative framework that addresses "institutions (pluralist secularism), interactions (social public sphere), and rights (constitutional provisions)" (p. 242). For her, fundamental human rights and democratic norms are important for all facets of society.

One of the strengths of the book is that it has an extensive and in-depth study of the existing literature on the theme, which broadens the reader's knowledge. The conclusion to each part of the discussion helps the reader comprehend it in a better way. While important for moving the discussion along, a few details also start to repeat themselves occasionally. There are several places in the text where the reader could become perplexed and have a lot of unanswered questions. First, the book claims to go beyond the liberal tradition and offer an alternative, but it seems that even if the discussion does not end, it at least centers on liberal ideals. One point that can be made is that multiculturalism is a by-product of liberalism. Second, the book does not offer a justification for why multiculturalism should be widely accepted in Muslim societies. Third, how much of their population qualifies as a majority and what does the term "Muslim majority" mean? Fourth, it is not clear throughout the book who the takers of "Muslim democracy" are. And lastly, does the word "Muslim" give new meaning to the concept of democracy? Probably it would have been better to call it a "multicultural democracy" rather than a "Muslim democracy."

To sum up, *A Political Theory of Muslim Democracy* is a fresh, timely, and groundbreaking work for readers and academics interested in the current philosophical debates ranging from liberalism, modernity, and multiculturalism to religion and politics. It is also a rich source of reference for those who are interested in the debates surrounding the Muslim world and MENA region politics. Additionally, it is a valuable contribution to the literature on democracy, secularism, and the public sphere, especially in the emerging field of comparative political theory.

The Fourth Ordeal:
A History of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, 1968-2018

By Victor J. Willi
Cambridge University Press, 2021, 489 pages, $82, ISBN: 9781108902649

Reviewed by Ömer Şipal, İbn Haldun University
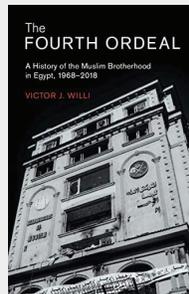
Ordeals were commonplace during the colonization period for the people of the Middle East and the states alike. This is no surprise. With the colonized powers gone, contrary to the dreams of lives without ordeals, expectations of ending the issues in the region have not been met. The old normalcy has become the de facto reality for those in the region and on occasion the de jure of peoples' lives. Egypt in general and the Muslim Brotherhood have been a vivid embodiment of these kinds of ordeals. *The Fourth Ordeal: A History of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, 1968-2018* written by Victor J. Willi, a book on "the fourth ordeal" befalling the Brotherhood after the coup d'état in 2013, is a narration of a history culminating in one of the bloodiest periods of Egypt's modern history. The book details this narration by passing through the first ordeal of 1949, the long second ordeal of the