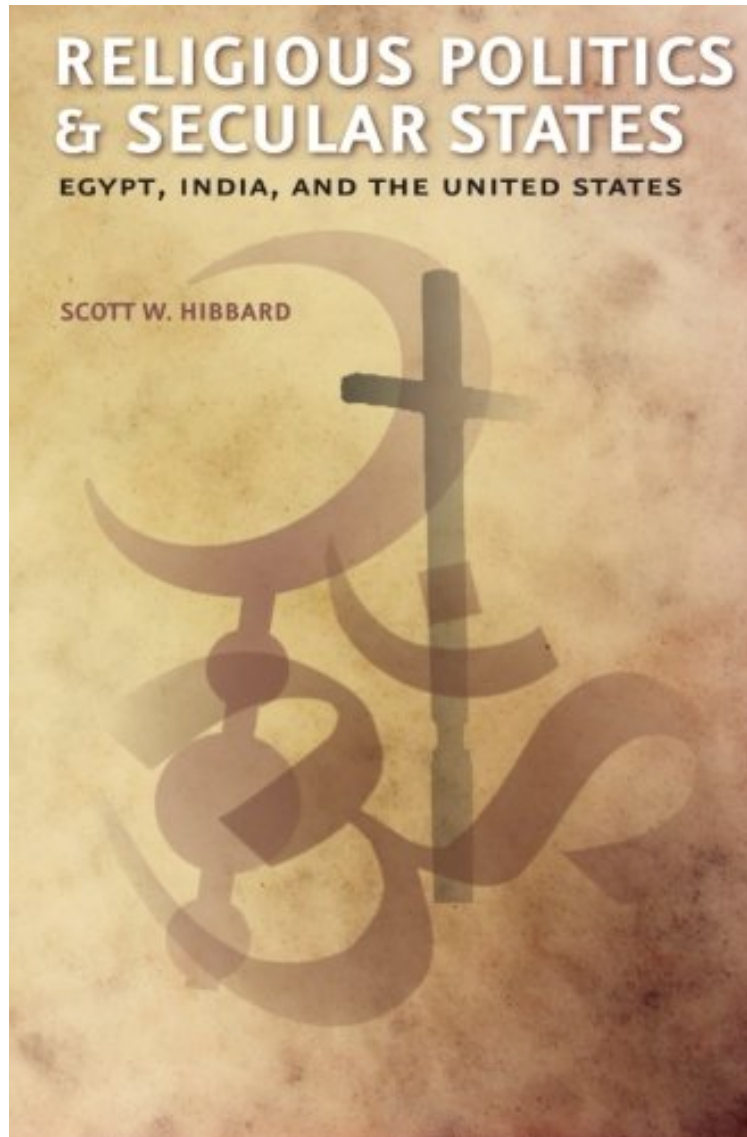


(Download free pdf) Religious Politics and Secular States: Egypt, India, and the United States

# Religious Politics and Secular States: Egypt, India, and the United States

*Scott W. Hibbard*

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**Scott W. Hibbard : Religious Politics and Secular States: Egypt, India, and the United States** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Religious Politics and Secular States: Egypt, India, and the United States:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. More relevant today than when it was written.By Bruce BoyleIt

explores fundamentalism as an influence in politics in Muslim countries and the US. Reasonably moist reading (as opposed to dry :-)) 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Top Down: Political Elites Use Religion For Partisan Gain By Lawrence Hedblom Religious Politics and Secular States is a book that came out last Fall, written by Scott Hibbard of DePaul University. It is a comparative study that looks at the religious politics of three societies - Egypt, India and the US. Interestingly, each of these countries was considered "secular" in the mid-twentieth century. The book offers a decidedly different approach to the phenomenon of religious politics than other, similar works. Instead of looking at the social movements associated with "religious fundamentalisms," this book focuses on the way in which religion is manipulated by political elites. It also looks at the way in which this type of manipulation helped to bring extreme forms of religious fundamentalism into the political mainstream. Hibbard's approach to the study of religion and politics is novel for two reasons. First, he is taking a "top down," as opposed to a "bottom up," approach to the topic. In other words, those who focus on social movements look at the changing trends in religion, and see this as the driving force behind political change. Religion, from this view, emerges organically from social life to influence national politics (i.e. the influence is from the bottom up). Hibbard, on the other hand, is looking at how elites - political and religious - have manipulated religion for partisan gain. It is not religion, per se, that is driving the process, but, rather, political actors who use the ideas and images of religion for their own ends. The influence, in short, is from the top down. The second area where this book differs from other, similar studies, is its emphasis upon the historical narrative and the extensive field work that informs the case studies. While this is not novel, it does differ from the emphasis upon statistical analysis that is so prominent in the mainstream social science research. Robert Putnam's new book on religion and American politics, *American Grace* ([...]/), reflects this latter approach, and relies heavily upon extensive statistical research and the compilation of data. It also reflects a "bottom up" analysis, as opposed to Hibbard's "top down" approach. To be fair, it is not that one book or approach to the topic is necessarily better than the other; rather, they are simply different. Together, both books provide a very interesting - and complementary - analysis of what is in reality a very complex human phenomenon.

This comparative analysis probes why conservative renderings of religious tradition in the United States, India, and Egypt remain so influential in the politics of these three ostensibly secular societies. The United States, Egypt, and India were quintessential models of secular modernity in the 1950s and 1960s. By the 1980s and 1990s, conservative Islamists challenged the Egyptian government, India witnessed a surge in Hindu nationalism, and the Christian right in the United States rose to dominate the Republican Party and large swaths of the public discourse. Using a nuanced theoretical framework that emphasizes the interaction of religion and politics, Scott W. Hibbard argues that three interrelated issues led to this state of affairs. First, as an essential part of the construction of collective identities, religion serves as a basis for social solidarity and political mobilization. Second, in providing a moral framework, religion's traditional elements make it relevant to modern political life. Third, and most significant, in manipulating religion for political gain, political elites undermined the secular consensus of the modern state that had been in place since the end of World War II. Together, these factors sparked a new era of right-wing religious populism in the three nations. Although much has been written about the resurgence of religious politics, scholars have paid less attention to the role of state actors in promoting new visions of religion and society. *Religious Politics and Secular States* fills this gap by situating this trend within long-standing debates over the proper role of religion in public life.

"Students of contemporary religion and contemporary politics should consider Hibbard's argument very seriously." (Jack David Eller Anthropology Database) "With its accessible language and rich examples, this book would be of interest to a wide audience that includes general readers as well as scholars of religion and politics." (Choice) "His analysis, carried through across three different religions, is impressive." (Jonathan Benthall Times Literary Supplement) "This is a fascinating work, well worth a careful read by Middle East specialists." (Paul Sedra of Middle East Studies) "An important contribution to the literature on religion and politics. Hibbard's argument is ambitious, the macro-comparison of Egypt, India, and the United States is novel and interesting, and he has clearly done a wealth of research." (Steven A. Cook, author of *Ruling but Not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria, and Turkey*) "The study of religious nationalism has gathered considerable momentum in the last twenty years. But no one has shown so comprehensively as Scott Hibbard the impact of the political manipulation of religion on shaping national ideals. His examination of the contemporaneous policies of the Indian, Egyptian, and American governments is as revealing as it is original." (David Little, Harvard Divinity School) From the Back Cover This comparative analysis probes why conservative renderings of religious tradition in the United States, India, and Egypt remain so influential in the politics of these three ostensibly secular societies. Although much has been written about the resurgence of religious politics, scholars have paid less attention to the role of state actors in promoting new visions of religion and society. *Religious Politics and Secular States* fills this gap by situating this trend within longstanding debates over the proper role of religion in public life. "With its accessible language and rich examples, this book would be of interest to a wide audience that includes general readers as well as scholars of religion and politics." Choice "An important contribution to the literature on religion and politics." Steven A. Cook, Council on

Foreign Relations"[Hibbard's] examination of the contemporaneous policies of the Indian, Egyptian and American governments is as revealing as it is original."David Little, Harvard Divinity SchoolAbout the AuthorScott W. Hibbard is an associate professor in the Department of Political Science at DePaul University. He is the coauthor of *Islamic Activism and U.S. Foreign Policy*.