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Syrianbarometer: A framework for achieving social cohesion with Syrians in Turkey

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Walton expertly critiques the 'civil society effect,' the concept of 'religious freedom' could have been complicated and problematised further in light of the recent political developments as well as the emerging scholarship highlighting the negative political implications of this concept. For example, his readers might want to learn whether the author thinks the Gülen movement's advocacy for 'interfaith dialogue,' especially in international settings, could potentially be a sign of an ulterior political motive. Or they might want to know what the author thinks about the AKP's utilisation of religious liberty as a domestic policy tool to mobilise its constituency to protest developments in places like the Rakhine state in Myanmar, the Xinjiang region in China, and Israel and Palestine, where Muslim minorities experience violence and various other atrocities. What political effect does the discourse of religious freedom achieve in the context of the AKP government's domestic and foreign policies in comparison to the way in which it has been used by Muslim civil society actors? Despite not addressing these issues, Walton's ethnography is quite illuminating in providing a captivating panorama of the diverse landscape of Muslim civil society during that brief period when nongovernmental actors had the audacity to challenge the state sovereignty over religion. Readers interested in the politics of religious freedom, civil religion, and faith-based organisations will immensely benefit from reading *Muslim Civil Society and the Politics of Religious Freedom in Turkey*. Undoubtedly, it will be widely assigned in undergraduate and graduate courses on religion and politics, political anthropology, Islam, the Middle East, and Turkey.

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Syrianbarometer: A framework for achieving social cohesion with Syrians in Turkey, by Murat Erdogan, Istanbul, Bilgi University Press, 2018, 196 pp. (paperback), TL 32.00, ISBN 978-605-399-513-5

The massive cross-border movement of people since the outbreak of the civil war in Syria seven years ago and the prolonged displacement of Syrians since then has brought renewed attention to the importance of refugee politics, as evidenced by a burgeoning literature in various disciplines. The so-called Syrian refugee crisis is no exception to the rule in that, as in most refugee movements, the majority of the displaced population is being hosted by neighboring countries, challenging their economic, political and social stability. This timely book by Murat Erdogan looks at Turkey, the country hosting the highest number of refugees in the world as of 2017 (about 4 million, of which 3.5 million are Syrians). It attempts to unveil the inter-group dynamics resulting from this movement and their coexistence within

the host society. With a data-driven approach, illustrating the results of two original surveys, one conducted among Syrians and the other with the Turkish host society, this book distinguishes itself from similar studies with a smaller scope. It has important political and theoretical implications for refugee integration policies, international cooperation on refugees, as well as the literature on intergroup relations.

This book consists of six chapters. It begins by laying out the legal and political framework regarding Syrians in Turkey and demographic data in terms of birth rates, education, inclusion in the labor market and access to services. It largely praises Turkish policy-makers for achievements thus far, yet also points out shortcomings such as lack of a clear overall strategy and targets for integration. The book starts and ends with the recognition that after such a prolonged displacement as in the case of Syrians in Turkey, the coexistence of host society and refugees is inevitable and reveals out-group perceptions, misperceptions as well as potential areas of conflict from the perspective of both communities. Following the somewhat long introductory chapter, the purpose of the study, its methodology, and results of the two surveys conducted with Syrians (in camps and outside of camps) and among Turkish citizens are laid out. The survey has modules on individual attitudes including social distance, stereotype attribution, level of contact, and political attitudes such as attainment of citizenship, economic and political rights, and future expectations. The employment of universal scales for measurement of these concepts allows for a better comparison with similar studies conducted elsewhere.

The author acknowledges the hospitality and inclusiveness of Turkish society and policy-makers, but at the same time he shows only the bottom of the iceberg by exploring the rather negative attitudes of the two populations towards each other. This important finding suggests that even if there are no major intergroup conflicts, this does not mean there is no potential for such and that harmony between Turks and displaced Syrians should not be taken for granted. Socio-economic data as well as results from the surveys illustrate major achievements of integration in the areas of basic services and education, but also the lack of an effective strategy for inclusion in the labor market. The potential for conflict, along with negative perceptions and misperceptions point out to the limitations of the current political discourse in Turkey grounded in the religious teachings regarding the burden of the 'host' (*ensar*) to welcome and care for the 'guest, escaping persecution' (*muhacir*). The results also illustrate that this kind of discourse widely employed by policy-makers does not widely resonate and the limitations of the tacit and fragile consent of the Turkish public, which is wearing off very rapidly.

While not (yet) tested with rigorous statistics, this study has important theoretical and political implications based on the descriptive illustrations of the data. One very striking finding relates to the perceived cultural dissimilarity of the out-groups to the in-group. Contrary to more Euro-centric expectations in terms of the potential high level of similarity between Turkish society and the Syrian refugee population, public perceptions point to the opposite in that Turks did to perceive Syrians as very different from themselves.

Furthermore, the cultural (dis)similarity perceptions seem to correlate well with the social distance of these groups, a finding consistent with findings towards different immigrant groups in the countries such as the U.S., U.K., and Germany. The comparisons of respondents living in the border provinces with the rest of the population suggest that superficial contact with refugees is not enough to mitigate negative attitudes. In fact, people in those areas hold even more negative attitudes towards Syrian refugees than others (and vice versa for Syrians). This finding not only necessitates a more nuanced approach to various hypotheses in terms of deeper levels of contact, but also implies conflict could be an important predictor of these negative attitudes. In other words, this could be because most of the contact between groups is one of mere coexistence or brief forms of superficial contact in public spaces, and/or the contact is indicative of competition between groups for scarce resources. After all, border communities are disproportionally more likely to suffer from the consequences of immigration as compared to others in terms of the rising housing costs and lower wages and feel deprived of the national/international humanitarian aid exclusively targeting the refugee communities. This is also evident in some of the survey results such as the very negative position of unemployed Turks on granting work permits (63%) or the percentage of the people who feel that they themselves or their families were harmed by the existence of Syrians in border cities being more than twice as much of other provinces.

The results also point to considerable misperceptions about the out-group. For instance, among Turks, there is high agreement with the statement that Syrians are abusing the welfare state – a common stereotype attributed to out-groups in most contexts. However, this is not supported by actual data on government spending or reporting of Syrians from the survey sample. Another is the belief that most Syrians live on humanitarian aid alone, while in reality over one million Syrians are in the labor market either formally and (mostly) informally. According to the survey among Syrians, only 20% report to be on welfare. Another striking finding relates to ideology, with implications on the comparative literature on political cues. Despite recent political polarization in Turkish society, there seems to be one issue that unites people: negative perceptions of and high social distance to the Syrian refugee population. While on some battery items Justice and Development Party (AKP) supporters, Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) supporters, and ethnic Kurds hold slightly less hostile attitudes, overall the differences are rather negligible. The negative attitudes held by the host society across the political spectrum indicate that the lack of either politicization or securitization of the issue by policy-makers or mainstream media does not reflect on public opinion. Rather than political cues, a bottom-up securitization evident in alternative outlets such as social media may account for these attitudes.

In terms of integration attitudes and the level of protection available, the results of the Syrian sample reflect the overall policy framework where free access to health care and education produces higher satisfaction with these services. Furthermore, Syrians report high trust in state institutions, possibly more

than the host society itself, and high sociotropic expectations from the Turkish economy. Nevertheless, issues of employment and widespread prejudice within Turkish society seem to be the main areas of complaint for Syrians, resulting in high social distance from the host society, especially outside of the camps and in border areas where inter-group contact is high.

Despite important implications of these findings on various theories of inter-group relations and integration policies, the book does not speak to any theoretical debates in the literature. This is the main shortcoming of this study. The theoretical framework may be left to the future work by the author, but it could still be elaborated briefly. There is also a striking comparison between the two waves of the survey data, yet one is left with many questions about the reason behind the worsening of attitudes of the Turkish population, an issue that certainly needs more elaboration. Furthermore, while the generous use of crosstabs between variables are suggestive of potential relationships, the author still falls short of testing any specific hypotheses. Therefore, a more rigorous statistical analysis is necessary for a proper causal inference and interpreting the results in terms of their theoretical implications. Nonetheless, this data-driven study is an important and valuable contribution to the literature on integration and inter-group relations by providing clear evidence with a very well-executed representative survey. The author concludes by warning of further deterioration of negative perceptions within both groups and the emergence of parallel societies as seen in many parts of the world, which could become important challenges in the wake of the worsening economic conditions in Turkey and a potential new wave of refugee flow due to the unresolved conflict in Syria. Finally, the author makes valuable policy recommendations to domestic policy-makers and the international community based on these important findings.

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