Tragically, dictatorship and civil strife have led to less developed, less democratic, and more conflict-prone contemporary Muslim-majority societies. Ahmed argues, however, neither Islam nor aspects of Muslim culture are the cause. Grounded in a positive political economy approach, Conquests and Rents investigates why these societies are predisposed to political violence and low levels of development. Focusing on the role of political institutions and economic rents, Ahmed argues that territories where Islam spread via military conquest developed institutions and practices impervious to democracy and more prone to civil war, while societies in non-conquered territories developed governance structures more susceptible to democracy when rents decline. Conquests and Rents introduces a novel theoretical argument, with corroborative qualitative and statistical analysis, to examine the interplay of the historical legacy of institutions from the premodern period and contemporary rent streams in Muslim-majority societies.

Faisal Z. Ahmed studies political economy and international economics. His research is interdisciplinary and has appeared in journals, such as the American Political Science Review and The Review of Economics and Statistics. Ahmed is the author of The Perils of International Capital (Cambridge University Press, 2020).
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Conquests and Rents

A Political Economy of Dictatorship
and Violence in Muslim Societies

FAISAL Z. AHMED

Princeton University
For Saba and our daughter, Ameena
# Contents

*List of Figures*  page xi
*List of Tables*  xiii
*Acknowledgments*  xv

**PART I A POLITICAL ECONOMY APPROACH**

1  Political Violence  3
2  Analytical Framework  24

**PART II THE INSTITUTIONAL LEGACY OF MUSLIM CONQUEST**

3  The Conquest Equilibrium  69
4  Conquest Fostered Autocratization  100
5  The Autocratic Legacy of Muslim Conquest  133

**PART III THE IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY RENTS ON DICTATORSHIP AND VIOLENCE**

6  Fueling Authoritarian Resilience  179
7  Aiding Political Violence  206
8  Democratic Transitions in Non-Muslim Societies  236

**PART IV CONCLUSION**

9  Conclusion  263

*References*  275
*Index*  291
Figures

1.1 Cohesive institutions (welfare spending) is associated with greater democracy  
1.2 Research design  
1.3 Percentage of a modern state’s territory conquered by Muslim armies  
1.4 Muslim conquest and contemporary democracy  
2.1 Persistent democratic deficit in Muslim societies  
2.2 Cohesiveness in Muslim and non-Muslim societies  
2.3 Democracy in Muslim oil and non-oil producers  
2.4 Civil war and democracy in Muslim non-oil producers  
2.5 Foreign aid and civil war in Muslim non-oil producers  
2.6 Democracy and public goods  
2.7 Democracies exert greater tax effort  
2.8 Game tree  
2.9 Political violence as a function of cohesive institutions ($\theta$) and rents ($R$)  
A1 Democracy in non-Muslim countries  
A2 Democracy and civil war in Muslim oil producers  
A3 Civil war and foreign aid in non-Muslim non-oil producers  
A4 Civil war and oil prices in Muslim oil producers  
3.1 From Muslim conquest to contemporary political institutions  
4.1 The spread of Islam by 1100  
4.2 Change in state centralization during Muslim conquest  
4.3 State centralization in the premodern period  
4.4 State centralization, with a “typical” (treated) and synthetic conquered territory  
5.1 Muslim rule and provincial first parliaments in Medieval Spain
Muslim conquest reduces a country's accumulated democratic experience
Religiosity and democratic experience
Religiosity and accumulated democracy, by Muslim-majority status
Religiosity and democratic experience in Muslim societies, by conquest status
Democracy over time in Muslim societies, by their exposure to mamluk institutions
Democracy in oil- and non-oil-producing Muslim societies exposed to mamluk institutions
Marginal effect of oil wealth on democracy as conquest varies
Democracy in “initially nondemocratic” petrostates over time, by conquest status
Average foreign aid receipts in Muslim and non-Muslim non-oil producers
Oil price and the aid windfall to Muslim countries
Political violence in Muslim aid recipients
Differential in foreign aid and civil war incidence between Muslim and non-Muslim recipients
Aiding authoritarianism in Muslim recipients
Commercial loans and oil prices in Latin American non-oil producers
Commercial loans and democracy in Latin American non-oil producers
Trade subsidies and oil prices in Eastern European Soviet satellites
Trade subsidies and democracy in Eastern European Soviet satellites
Timing since the Neolithic Revolution and democracy in 1985
Tables

1.1 Comparison of democracy, civil war, and economic well-being across Muslim and non-Muslim societies

1.2 Summary of theoretical predictions

1.3 Conquest status, rents, and variation in political violence, with country examples
   2.1 Incumbent’s optimal choice in political violence
   2.2 Incumbent and opposition optimal choices

4.1 Territories “exposed” to Islam by 1100

4.2 State centralization during Muslim expansion

4.3 Robustness of state centralization during Muslim expansion

4.4 Muslim conquest and autocratization: Matched counterfactuals and competing explanations

4.5 Examining the components of state centralization

4.6 Political survival during Muslim expansion

4.7 The importance of mamluk institutions during Muslim expansion

4.8 The marginal effect of foreign interventions on state centralization
   5.1 Muslim rule and first parliaments in Spanish provinces
   5.2 Muslim conquest harms a country’s contemporary democratic experience
   5.3 Muslim conquest lowers institutional cohesiveness
   5.4 Accounting for explanations from the premodern period
   5.5 Accounting for the impact of European colonialism
   5.6 Accounting for explanations from the contemporary (modern) period
   5.7 Tracing the conquest equilibrium since 1500
### List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>The long-run effect of Muslim conquest on alternate measures of democracy</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>Muslim conquest and fiscal capacity</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>Muslim conquest (alternate measures) and democracy</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4</td>
<td>2SLS estimates with distance to Mecca as an instrumental variable</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Political stability in nondemocratic petrostates</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Oil wealth harms democracy</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>The causal effect of oil wealth on democracy</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Oil wealth does not heighten civil war in conquest petrostates</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Repression in conquest oil producers</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>The pacifying effect of US troop deployment in conquest petrostates</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Incidence of civil war in Muslim and non-Muslim non-oil producers, by periods of low and high oil prices</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>The causal effect of oil-price-induced foreign aid on civil war</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Alternate measures of foreign aid and accounting for unobserved heterogeneity</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Addressing potential violations of the exclusion restriction</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>The heightened impact of aid on civil war in countries exposed to mamluk institutions</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>Trajectory of democracy in Muslim recipients after civil war</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1</td>
<td>Sample of non-oil-producing foreign aid recipients</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Correlates of cohesive institutions in Muslim and non-Muslim non-oil-producing societies</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>Foreign transfers are associated with less democracy</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>An exogenous decline in transfers and political violence</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>The Neolithic determinants of (modern) cohesive institutions</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>Political violence with changes in oil prices and exogenous institutions</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>Rents and politics in conquest and non-conquest states since 1960</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Developmental challenges associated with rents</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgments

As part of my freshman writing seminar at Northwestern University, Professor Edward Gibson assigned Samuel Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. In this now infamous book, Huntington proffered a seductively simple explanation for patterns of democracy – and relatedly, economic development and violence – across the world: culture. In this account, Islam was a root cause for the lack of democracy and bouts of civil strife across many contemporary Muslim-majority societies.

At the time, I found Huntington’s thesis unsatisfying as I had lived in and visited several Muslim countries that did feature democratic politics – albeit often with flaws that are characteristic of many developing countries – and whose national governments were often headed by elected female leaders. My personal experiences reinforced the notion that democracy and Islam are not inherently incompatible. The question of why Islam is seemingly associated with dictatorship and violence remained with me.

This book attempts to provide a positive political economy perspective to understand why so many contemporary Muslim societies (but not all) tend to exhibit dictatorship and violence. This endeavor would have not been possible without the encouragement and feedback of my collaborators, colleagues, fellow researchers, and my family. I would like to take this opportunity to briefly thank them.

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Acknowledgments

Conflict in the Muslim World” (published in the Quarterly Journal of Political Science).

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