

## Dynamics of Islam and Politics in the Middle East region (Analysis of Conflict, Roles, and Future Challenges)

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**Abstract:** The Middle East, a region steeped in religious history, is the birthplace of major religions such as Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Religion profoundly influences the political and social order in this region, with Islam, as the majority religion, playing a crucial role in shaping state policies and political direction. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 was a pivotal event that reinforced the influence of Islam in politics. Subsequently, Islamic movements have impacted political changes, notably during the Arab Spring, which aimed to transition autocratic systems to democracy with varied outcomes. However, the region is also marked by long-standing conflicts driven by religious, ethnic, and economic interests, exacerbated by the discovery of abundant oil resources since the 1930s. Western intervention and local political dynamics have further complicated the geopolitical landscape, resulting in prolonged conflicts with global repercussions. This research employs a quantitative approach with descriptive methods, primarily relying on a literature review. The literature review involves analyzing relevant sources such as books, journals, and articles to identify key patterns and themes, providing insight into the region's problems. Historical analysis is also utilized to understand the evolution of theories and concepts over time. The synthesized findings offer a comprehensive understanding and propose alternative solutions to the region's challenges.

**Keywords:** *Middle East; religion; politics; Islam,*

## INTRODUCTION

Islam as the majority religion in the Middle East plays an important role in determining the actions of the state and various parties in the region. Over the years, the Middle East has attracted worldwide attention due to its rich history. Starting from the cultural heyday in the Nile, Euphrates, and Tigris river valleys, to the political shock in Iran when Islamic powers emerged, transforming the kingdom into an Islamic republic, which was then accompanied by bloodshed due to various domestic, regional, and international conflicts. international political interests. In addition, several centuries earlier, the Middle East had given birth to many "miracles", making the region a spiritual center with the birth of major religions such as Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, as well as being a place for the development of various religious sects and sects. (Ruslin, 2013) . Several previous studies have shown that the Middle East does have a long history as a religious and spiritual center and also its influence on politics, as in

Shafira Elnanda Yasmine's research with the title Arab Spring: Islam in Middle Eastern social and democratic movements. In this research, the Arab Spring discusses political change, which is significant in countries previously under autocratic systems of government. In Muhammad Turhan Yani's research entitled Discourse on Democratic Government and Political Dynamics in Middle Eastern Countries, the main focus of this research is to identify and understand the factors that make democratic Islamic politics difficult to implement in these countries, the last being The book written by Syarifuddin Fadillah and Ujang Syarifudin in this book discusses three characteristics of political conflicts in the Middle East which differentiate them from other political conflicts in the international region. First, the political conflict in the Middle East is prolonged, second, the conflict involves large countries and third, the conflict leads to a clash of world civilizations (Syafiuddin & Komaruddin, 2014). Of the 3 studies that have been discussed, what differs from previous research is how the dynamics of Islamic political influence in the Middle East can overcome conflicts influenced by political, ethnic, religious, and economic interests.

Religion, sects, and sects are often the basis of conflict in the Middle East. Tensions, wars, and conflicts continue to occur in the Middle East today, both between tribes, religions, sects, sects and politics. To date, hundreds of millions of people have felt the impact (Ananda, 2018). On the other hand, after the discovery of barren and sandy underground oil in the 1930s, the area became a "mecca" for disputes and conflicts between intra-regional countries and the West. Because the Middle East is considered a "new and strategic power", debates are starting to emerge regarding the dynamics and practical political situations throughout the world (Handoko, 2019).

Kasijanto Sastridinomo believes that the geopolitical concept developed by the West and its allies refers more to the "Middle East" than just a "geographical region". After World War II, Alfred Thayer Mahan, a US naval strategist, used the term "Middle East" to refer to the eastern region around the desert of the former Ottoman Empire not far from Europe. After World War II, the name "Middle East" began to be used to refer to a region full of conflict. George Lenczowski describes political life in the Middle East as a "plot" between several Western countries and local political forces. In other words, the term "Middle East" can also be considered a product of this collaboration.

A religion that teaches peace to every adherent appears in a place where there is almost no word "Peace". Instead, God has given rich mineral resources to the barren Middle East, especially petroleum, which makes a lot of money and is the envy of any country. One regional conflict that is prolonged in nature is the Middle East conflict. This conflict is considered to be protracted because a resolution has not been reached. Many parties participated in the settlement, from international organizations such as the UN to superpowers such as the United States and Russia. Conflict seems to continue because of the opportunistic, selfish, and pragmatic attitude of Middle Eastern society, including its leaders (Abdullah, 2016).

Many people around the world see the Middle East as a place where radical Islamic groups and related ideologies have emerged. Apart from that, the modern Middle East is also interesting because it is still a place prone to conflict and violence. In the 21st century, the focus of international politics is no longer on territorial invasion. However, it does not rule out the possibility that new countries will emerge in the Middle East. One example is the referendum held in 2011 which decided that South Sudan should withdraw from Sudan. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) was founded in 2013 by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and now controls several unstable areas in Iraq and Syria. In the future, the border map of the Middle East may change. The sources of violence in the Middle East are varied, but radical Islamic movements

are often linked to regional conflicts. "Jihad" is often used to describe Islam's holy war against other religions.

## **METHOD**

Research is a series of scientific actions aimed at solving a problem. The research aims to provide explanations and answers to problems and provide alternative solutions in the future (Anwar, 2001) . In this research, quantitative research is used which is based on descriptive analysis, and the type of method used is a Literature Study. namely, research that uses books as a data source. This research was carried out by reading, studying, and analyzing several previous literature related to the research topic. These books, journals, and articles are examples of literature used in this research (Mahmud, 2011).

In research using library methods, technical data analysis involves collecting, organizing, and analyzing information from various relevant literature. The process begins by collecting literature that includes books, articles, and research reports related to the topic. This literature is organized around a particular theme or subject. Then, content analysis is carried out to identify main themes and patterns, followed by thematic analysis to group information based on the themes found. Historical comparisons and analyses are carried out to understand differences, similarities, and theoretical developments over time. The results of this analysis are synthesized into a comprehensive understanding, ensuring only valid data is used, and presented in a systematic research report.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

Islam plays a central role in political dynamics in the Middle East, influencing the actions of countries and various parties in the region. Even though Islam teaches peace, the Middle East region is still the center of protracted conflicts. This conflict was triggered by various factors such as differences in ethnicity, religion, and economic interests, especially those related to petroleum. The influence of religion on politics in the Middle East is very strong, which can be seen from Iran's transformation into an Islamic republic and the dominance of religious issues in regional politics. This research also highlights how conflicts in the Middle East often involve large countries and lead to a clash of world civilizations (Rahmat, 2015) .

Additionally, this research reveals that despite efforts to implement democracy in several Middle Eastern countries, challenges related to political conflicts, economic interests, and religious differences make implementing democracy difficult. This is exacerbated by the opportunistic and pragmatic views that exist in Middle Eastern society, including among its political leaders. Conflicts in this region not only impact regional stability but also have global implications, making the Middle East a major focus in international politics and geopolitics. The findings of this research emphasize the importance of understanding the complexity of the relationship between religion and politics in efforts to achieve stability and peace in the Middle East.

### **Security and Conflict in the Middle East**

The era of power often gives rise to conflicts in various places. Countries move dynamically due to increasingly complex societies and the influence of powerful countries in the world. For years, the Middle East region has continued to be involved in conflict and violence which has become a major topic in the global media. However, if you look further, major religions such as Islam, Christianity, and Judaism have emerged in the region that

prioritize goodness and truth. In addition, all three religions declare that Jerusalem is a holy place. Ironically, a religion that teaches peace to all its followers appears in a place where the word "peace" is almost nonexistent. (Masang, 2018) . This conflict continues to this day because there is no clear resolution. Many groups are involved in this settlement, from international institutions such as the UN to superpowers such as the United States and Russia. Due to the selfish and pragmatic attitude of Middle Eastern society, including its leaders, the conflict seems to continue. There are three types of conflict in the Middle East: economic, socio-political, and ideological. Let's see how each problem is divided into three.

### *Economy*

The conflict in the Middle East has disrupted the global economy. This can be seen directly in the capital market, where there has been an increase in the composite stock index on the global market. Oil is one of the main commodities in the Middle East. Almost every country in the region, from Saudi Arabia to Iraq to countries around the Gulf such as the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Qatar, has oil resources. This makes the Middle East even more important because oil is the primary and essential fuel for a thriving modern society.

This number is enough to make the Middle East the most important region in the world, although there is other variability. Two-thirds of the world's proven oil reserves consist of petroleum. Due to various simple and cheap factors, Middle Eastern oil production continues to increase rapidly and now accounts for around 45% of global production. The free flow of oil from the Middle East is a threat to the lives and businesses of both countries, because Western Europe and Japan get 70% of their oil needs from there, and Japan even gets 80%. Thus, the Middle East has enormous economic and political potential. Oil makes Middle Eastern countries rich because their oil reserves reach 60% of the world's oil reserves (Sundari, 2022) . On the other hand, the conflict in the Middle East is also caused by oil. Iran and Iraq are arguing over oil in the Shatt al-Arab waters. Since Iraq only has sea access 19 km from the coast of Um Qashr on the Persian Gulf, the port of Basrah is very important for Iraqi trade activities. However, due to its short coastline, Iraq has difficulty exporting oil by sea (Gassama et al., 2020) .

### *Social politics*

The Middle East consists of many different countries and peoples. These differences unite the tribes in the Middle East but often lead to conflict. One of the conflicts that has been going on since the colonial period until now is the Arab-Israeli conflict which started with the founding of Israel in 1948 and continued until 1967. The conflict that occurs most frequently in the general public is the conflict between the Kurds and the Turks and Arabs. ethnic group. The Kurds are unique in that they are composed of three other tribes: Iraqi, Iranian, and Turkish. Therefore they are also called a nomadic tribe (Muttaqin, 2018) .

### *Ideology*

Compared to democracy's struggle for the prosperity of its people, events in the Middle East such as Syria, Libya, Iraq, Egypt, and even Afghanistan are much further away.

Middle Eastern people have different political views due to ideological understanding. Middle Eastern people have different political views due to ideological understanding. Because it triggers conflict and civil war. Conflicts in Middle Eastern society are mainly caused by differences in religion, political system, and ethnicity. Various Western ideologies, such as democracy, conflict with the values and culture of current Middle Eastern governments. In a

situation where Middle Eastern society tends to be comfortable with autocratic or even dictatorial governments, as depicted by Western society, the way out to resolve conflicts in the Middle East is not ideology such as democracy, liberalism, and human rights. These thoughts are very inconsistent and contradictory.

### **Egyptian State Conflict**

Egypt is a social democratic republic with a president as president. Egypt is a country in the northeastern part of North Africa. Because Egyptian culture is a benchmark for cultural development in the world, Egypt's existence is very important to the international world. This success cannot be separated from Egypt, which is the route between the three continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe. Egypt's security stability has been disrupted by shifts that have occurred in recent years. In 2011, political upheaval in Egypt began with 18 days of Egyptian public demonstrations urging Hosni Mubarak to leave office and demanding the start of a political transition process as soon as possible. The demonstration, which lasted for nineteen days with increasing duration and took place in various large Egyptian cities such as Alexandria and Suez, finally produced results that met the people's expectations. After announcing his resignation through the vice president (David Akhmad Richard, 2011).

Deteriorating economic conditions and alleged corruption violations committed by the political elite are also the main factors causing this. Another factor causing Egypt's political instability is conflict between religious groups. One of them occurred in January 2011 in front of the al-Qiddissin (Two Saints) Church in the city of Alexandria. A total of 21 people died in the suicide bombing, and several congregants were injured. The government then announced to the public that the action was carried out by Islamic Forces, a Palestinian militant group in Gaza. This group opposes the government's accusations regarding this incident.

Change in Egypt began with the official resignation of Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011, through the Egyptian people's revolution. Egypt must immediately take the right policies after Hosni Mubarak's government to rebuild the country's stability and save the economy which deteriorated after the revolution, especially in a more open and democratic political transition process. Because of this event, only Mubarak and his family, oligarchs close to the authorities, leaders of the government and the NDP party, as well as military leaders who were subordinate to Hosni Mubarak were eliminated (Anderson, 2010).

The post-Hosni Mubarak government structure must be urgently updated, as the Military Council and state bureaucratic structures continue to operate, and their position can control the stagnant political transition. Some people in the government seem to continue to follow the orders of those before them.

### **Geopolitics of Türkiye**

Türkiye is a middle-class geopolitical country. This country is not strong enough to impose its policies, but it is also not weak enough to be forced into the orbit of other big countries. Türkiye's geographical location between Europe and Asia makes it a middle power. This position provided him with many economic opportunities and knowledge transfer, but

also placed him between many powerful countries and potential invaders, which made him vulnerable to security threats.

Turkey has become an important player in global energy geopolitics due to its favorable location between the energy-rich Middle East region and the Caspian basin, as well as the energy-hungry Middle East region. Europe. It is not surprising that Turkey is an important transit point for energy resources, especially natural gas, thus becoming an important supplier to meet Europe's significant energy needs (Bilgin, 2009)

Due to its location in Asia and Europe and potential EU membership, Türkiye has a strategic geopolitical position. When the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi Government (AKP) came to power in 2002, Türkiye experienced a renaissance. Türkiye influences international policy due to its strategic geopolitical position, which provides important access between East and West. In the modern era, Türkiye has significant power and continues to be the dominant country through its foreign policies. With Turkey's geographical location, which directly borders southeastern Syria for 900 km and Greece in the west, there are strategic advantages to establishing cooperation with countries in various regions (Mustafa & Purwati, 2022)

Türkiye makes good use of its geopolitical strategic position. Located between Asia and Europe, Türkiye has an important role as a link between East and West. This also influenced his foreign policy. As categorized by Jim O'Neil as part of the MIST (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey), a group of countries with the highest economic growth, Turkey has developed into one of the most economically developed countries in recent decades. By becoming a member of NATO and the EU, Turkey has become politically stronger (Bustami, 2023).

The name Türkiye is often associated with a modern country that is experiencing rapid change. Turkey's ability to build diplomatic relations received positive responses from surrounding countries and the West, including Obama's first visit as president. Türkiye was the only Eurasian country mentioned in the 2007 foreign policy campaign.

Turkey strengthens diplomacy through cooperation in the fields of defense and security, including operations against terrorism and the PKK in its eastern region. Even though American-Turkish relations are good, Turkey remains independent, as evidenced by its rejection of Israel after the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010 which killed 9 people. Türkiye expelled the Israeli ambassador and cut diplomatic ties, including refusing Israeli aid to victims of the Van earthquake.

In the new geopolitical context, Turkey has a significant strategic position against major European powers, Russia, the United States, and China. This position has a major influence on US-Türkiye relations. Turkey takes advantage of its strategic position by increasing its economic, political, and diplomatic power, as well as becoming a member of the European Union and NATO, because America needs Turkey more for war and diplomacy in the Middle East and the Islamic Organization. Cooperation.

### **Challenge Iranian Politics**

Ibn Khaldun views politics as an effort to improve life as a whole, and he believes that political movements as a whole aim for the good and benefit of society as a whole. Islamic thinkers see politics as a tool to achieve greater goals than just a transition process or "struggle" for power (Mikail, 2019).

The Iranian revolution of 1979 took years, like other social revolutions. He will continue to be influential throughout time. Simply put, a coalition of opposition forces dominated by Shia Muslim fundamentalists overthrew the regime of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi.

Ayatollah Ruhullah Khomeini (1902–1989) was the main figure of this revolution. In the view of the world community, the broad conflict between religious and secular forces was a major struggle in the revolution, even though the causes of the revolution seemed to stem from various interrelated social problems that existed in Iranian society, as well as the economic crisis. Shah's health declined (Esposito, 2002) .

Even though the specific events that led to the overthrow of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi only occurred for barely a year before he left Iran on January 16, 1979, the social circumstances underlying the revolution had been developing for several centuries. Because Iran does not have a constitution, the public does not have direct access to important public policy decisions. However, religious leaders were concerned about the sale of ancestral property, and they initiated public protests that forced the shahs to change their actions. Protests spread across the country thanks to the efforts of reformist Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani, an Iranian cleric who began preaching about Islamic revival and resistance to the West starting in the 1870s.

The history of the conflict between the new dynasty of Reza Pahlavi and Khomeini is very long. After the First World War ended in 1921, Reza Khan, a military man, became national leader for a year full of conflict. Reza Shah ignored the new constitution and took power by decree. He initiated several major reforms in Iran aimed at modernizing the country. The Allies forced Reza Shah to abdicate in September 1941 because he was pro-German. His son, Muhammad Reza, took over his position. At that time, Khomeini began his first attack on the Pahlavi government. In an article entitled *Kasyf Al-Asrar*, which means Secret Revelation, he criticized regime change.

### **Conflict Saudi Arabia**

Abd Al-'Azīz bin 'Abd Al-Rahman Al-Sa'ūd proclaimed the kingdom of Saudi Arabia officially in 1932 and was ruled by his descendants in a royal form of government. In 1990, the Saudi government estimated that Saudi citizens, most of whom were Muslim, numbered around 15 million, and expected it to reach 20 million by 2000. However, in 1990, there were around 5 million foreigners living in the kingdom, especially from other countries. Arab countries (Esposito, 2002) .

The kingdom controlled 80% of the Arabian Peninsula and encompassed four distinct cultural and geographical regions. Its conquest by 'Abd Al-'Azīz in the first half of the 20th century united them. The eastern province on the shores of the Gulf, also known as Al-Hasā, is one of the most fertile areas in the kingdom. It is home to the oil industry and home to Saudi Arabia's Shiite minority, estimated to number between 200,000 and 500,000. To the southwest, Asīr is an agricultural region with a culture close to Yemen, the bordering country. On the shores of the Red Sea, the Hejaz has the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, which have been centers of the Hajj for many years. Ethnically diverse, the population is predominantly Sunni, but many foreigners live there, making up 70% of the population of the port city of Jeddah. Eventually, the desert covered Najd in Central Arabia from three sides. This place is home to the ruling family

The Gulf War and the Iraq War of 1990–1991 marked a significant turning point in terms of encouragement of Islam and rejection of the absolutism of the Saudi monarchy among Western liberals, religious conservatives, and advocates of human rights and minority groups. Many Saudis, based on diverse religious and political beliefs, oppose American laws of war and support nonviolent Arab solutions to regional problems. The opposition emphasizes the

incompetence of the Saudi military rather than the extraordinary costs spent on training and advanced equipment, even though funding for social programs has been reduced. Conservative religious groups complain about the military presence of non-Muslims in Saudi Arabia, especially women. Moreover, the Gulf War has demonstrated the monarchy's absolutism and weakness when it comes to human rights. This provides an opportunity for different groups with different political goals to demand political reform (Royan et al., 2022)

The government began by allowing more radical Islamic voices and supporting a conservative social agenda. In this way, the government could intimidate Western-oriented liberals trying to initiate a political process and at the same time appease the larger conservative base. For example, a group of Saudi women staged a street demonstration demanding the right to drive a car in November 1990. The government responded to the demonstration by punishing those who participated for supporting what clerics considered unIslamic behavior in the kingdom. This action was very well received by the general public. In posters displayed in public by the religious police, the woman was described as suffering from a sexual disorder.

### **The Role of Islam and Middle East Politics**

The role of religion and politics in the Middle East is very complex and has a significant impact on the lives of people in the region. Because Islam is the largest religion in the Middle East, religion greatly influences political identity and the way people interact with each other. In the Middle East, religion also plays an important role in delineating political identities and regulating relations between society and government. The role of religious and political intellectuals and political parties is very important for the democratization of every country, especially because of universal politics and standards (Zulfahmi, 2022).

People's understanding of religion, the state, and its figures has changed historically. The content and spirit of any religious diversity that emerged dozens of centuries ago has certainly undergone evolution due to changing times. For example, in the past, the revelation of the Koran involved direct discussions on political and social issues for 23 years. The Prophet Muhammad did so directly, and he was given sole authority from God to handle disputes.

All religions are considered manifestations of God's words that occurred in the past. However, under the leadership of these figures, religious institutions developed independently over time. State and religious institutions then attacked God's authority. Even religion and God do not have the same power to govern society. The regime can suppress religion and mock God in the name of the state because it considers that different religions mean different Gods and different religions are a threat to others so the state appears as the judge (Gunawan, 2017).

Human life is like traffic: everyone wants to move together and wants to go fast. However, because their interests are different, collisions and collisions will occur if there are no traffic rules in life. As a result, humans need rules to regulate their traffic, such as when to stop, get ready, and walk. A leading thinker today, Al-Mawdūdī, said that Islam is a complete religion that includes complete principles regarding all aspects of life, including morals, ethics, and political, social, and economic guidelines. In the sociopolitical realm, efforts have been made to determine how best to combine diversity and statehood. For example, Indonesia is often influenced by global markets and conflicts of solidarity and religious loyalty that transcend humanity and nationalism. However, there are times when someone prefers to maintain their religious beliefs even though they are outside their country. or individuals are



more loyal to groups or parties that use religious symbols rather than humanitarian values, the state, and nationalism.

There are several perspectives on "political Islam" to differentiate the entry of Islam into the secular or political realm from the practice of "Islam". Mandeville said that there had been links between Islamic political communities for a long time. Concepts such as state, power, political authority, and political agreements are mentioned in Islamic scriptures. Political leaders have been actively involved in diplomacy, trade negotiations, and warfare since the beginning of Islam (Rustam, 2023). Opinions that doubt the Islamic movement's commitment to the idea of democracy. Two reasons emerge: first, Islamic groups continue to try to implement sharia, which secular parties consider too discriminatory against women and non-Muslims. As a result, they are considered to adopt undemocratic policies if they come to power.

It is very important to consider the concept and position of jihad in Islam in the context of war and armed conflict in the context of international relations. Jihad has various definitions. Some people consider jihad to be a "holy war", but Peter Mandaville argues that interpreting jihad as a holy war is a misunderstanding. One of the main meanings of jihad is "to fight with all your might and effort". So, jihad has a broad and narrow meaning. In a broad sense, the word "jihad" is usually associated with armed conflict; for example, when Muslims try to avoid attacks from other countries, "Those who are opposed may fight because they have been persecuted."

### **Challenges for the Future of Middle East Politics**

Amid global developments, conflicts and wars continue to emerge in various places in the world. This is especially true in the Middle East, where various civilizations have conflicted for centuries. Comprised of various tribes, religions, and cultures, the Middle East often seems like an unfinished dough. Petroleum resources tempt all rulers, therefore the petroleum-rich Middle East has long been a place of conflict. Currently, the Middle East is hit by conflict, Islamic fanaticism, and even terrorism (Rahman, 2020).

Currently, the Middle East is plagued by conflict, Islamic fanaticism, and even terrorism. On the other hand, the Middle East is considered the cradle of various civilizations due to its rich culture, abundant natural resources, and center of luxury and expensive lifestyles. Having been an arena of conflict for several centuries, it is very difficult to restore the "Middle East" that the world community hopes for. Religious, ethnic, and socio-economic conflicts as well as power struggles between certain ethnic groups are caused by religious and ethnic differences (Surwandono, 2013). Apart from that, natural wealth such as petroleum is a major factor causing conflict between countries. During French and British rule in the region, Western philosophy concentrated only on building autocratic states ruled by a small number of colonial families. Therefore, Western ideology, especially "democracy", serves as the main tool for destroying unwanted governments in the global capitalist order.

### **CONCLUSION**

From this research, it can be concluded that Islam plays a central role in shaping political dynamics in the Middle East. The rich religious history and dominant influence of Islam have provided a strong coloring to state policy and political direction in the region. The 1979 Iranian Revolution marked a critical point at which Islam began to have a major influence in Middle Eastern politics, sparking the emergence of Islamist movements aimed at changing autocratic

systems of government. However, despite efforts to encourage democracy, the region remains haunted by long-standing conflicts that often involve religion, ethnicity, and economic interests. This conflict not only impacts regional stability but also has global implications, especially because of the region's rich oil resources. In addition, the involvement of Western countries and local political forces further complicates the situation. This research confirms that understanding the relationship between religion and politics is key to achieving stability and peace in the Middle East. Efforts to resolve conflicts and implement democracy in this region require a holistic approach and sensitivity to the complexity of the relationship between religion, politics, and economics

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